EMERSON: FROM PREACHER TO POET

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

CW	*The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 12 vols. Ed. Edward Waldo Emerson. Boston, 1903-1904.
E-C	*The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*. Ed., Joseph Slater. New York and London, 1964.
EL	*The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 2 vols. Ed., Stephen E. Whicher, *et al*. Cambridge, Mass., 1959, 1964.
J	*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 10 vols. Eds., Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes. Boston, 1909-1914.
JMN	*The Journals and Unpublished Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 5 vols. Ed., William H. Gilman, *et al*. Cambridge, Mass., 1960- .
L	*The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. 6 vols. Ed., Ralph L. Rusk. New York, 1939.
S	Emerson's unpublished sermons. (Mss. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)
Unc	*Uncollected Writings*. New York, 1912.
YES	*Young Emerson Speaks*. Ed., Arthur McGiffert. Boston, 1938.
CD	*The Christian Disciple*.
C Ex	*The Christian Examiner*.
NAR	*The North American Review*.

In all manuscripts cited, the pagination is 1, 1v, 2, 2v, 3, etc., following the system used in the Houghton Library, Harvard, for the Emerson collection.

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to discuss Emerson's main ideas about literary expression, with special attention to their background in Unitarian thought. A knowledge of this background is necessary in order to understand Emerson's literary program, and in past criticism lack of attention to it has, I believe, led to some misconceptions about Emerson's aesthetic which this thesis hopes to clarify.

In general, Emerson's literary ideas fall into two categories, which are the subjects of my second and third chapters: the creative process and literary style. To both, particularly the latter, considerable scholarship has been devoted, and I am in broad agreement with its consensus. It is generally accepted that Emerson's aesthetic theory is an isotope of romanticism. The creative act he regarded as properly a spontaneous process, and therefore he prized natural genius above meticulous craftsmanship. In style, he advocated a diction based on colloquial language and images drawn from nature, emphasizing especially the importance of metaphor; and he believed that form should be determined by the conception of the artist, not dictated by exterior standards.

The sensitivity with which Emerson develops these ideas makes him the representative theoretician of the literary wing of American transcendentalism, as Perry Miller has acknowledged by introducing his selection of transcendentalist verse with a long exerpt from "Poetry and Imagination."[1] The leading literary ideas of the Dial aesthtes are really just simplified versions of Emerson's.[2]

But since Emerson is inevitably associated even with the mediocrities in this group, whose work he sponsored and sometimes edited, and, more important, since he himself makes irresponsible-sounding statements about literature from time to time, his own literary ideas are easily caricatured. It has been contended that Emerson trusts too naively in creation by inspiration, without taking proper account of the importance of craftsmanship. Also, his theory of style has been accused of not coming to terms with the problem of coherence in literary form.[3] Emerson's own work may seem to support these contentions. He was in most cases a sporadic craftsman and his essays are obviously more powerful in flashes than as wholes.

Consequently, some of the best previous studies of Emerson's aesthetic theory--those of F. O. Matthiessen and Charles Feidelson, for example--have, with some justice, tended to picture him as a critic who had some original ideas about the nature of metaphor and imagery but was otherwise rather desultory and unsound. This judgment, however, is overly harsh. In both his criticism and literary practice there is ample evidence to show that Emerson had a responsible and definable attitude toward the matters of craftsmanship in writing and coherence in form .

Moreover, a frequent explanation for Emerson's supposed shortcomings, that he was not interested in art so much as religion, is dangerously oversimple. The explanation itself is plainly true: as I shall show below, Emerson's conception of the creative process rests on his idea of God and his idea of what style should be is founded upon his conception of nature. However, that these extraliterary considerations should have weakened his literary theory is by no means clear. Indeed, the reverse is true: Emerson's aesthetic is not only made possible but is vitalized by its metaphysical bases, even in the areas where his theory and practice are said to be weakest.

In order fully to recognize the positive contribution of Emerson's metaphysical ideas to his theories of literary expression, it is necessary to overcome another prejudice: that Emersonian transcendentalism was an imperfect reaction against the Unitarian faith. In this view, Emerson's break with the church was "good," but the frequent preoccupation of his later writing with religion and morals was an unfortunate vestige of his clerical background which makes his work more old-fashioned and less excellent as literature than that of Thoreau and Whitman.

There is some truth to this picture. However, in my opinion, the aesthetic side of Emerson's art and criticism, no less than its moral side, may profitably be seen as an outgrowth of Unitarianism. Emerson's change of vocations was not so much a revolt as an evolution, an evolution to some extent quickened by influences from English romanticism, but springing out of the indigenous religious movement itself. The Unitarian faith, particularly as preached by William Ellery Channing, supplied a rationale for an aesthetic more full and profound than anything New England had had before. This I shall try to explain in my first chapter, which discusses the background of Emerson's literary theories in the American criticism of the 1820's and in his own early writings. In addition, as my fourth chapter argues, Emerson's later style and ideas about style can be said to stem in part from typically Unitarian strategies used in his early sermons, which have not hitherto been the subject of much scholarly study.

The later Emerson's affinities with the Unitarian movement have been somewhat obscured, partly by himself. He referred to "the corpse-cold Unitarianism of Brattle Street" (CW, X, 552) and considered that Unitarianism was historically important not for what it affirmed but for what it denied. Moreover, the renewal of scholarly interest in Puritan sensibility and especially in Jonathan Edwards has tended to support Emerson's image of Unitarianism as cold, negative, and unspiritual, a sad falling off from the passionate piety of the forefathers. For Perry Miller, the vitality of Emerson is explained as a revival of the spirit of Edwards--a crackbrained revival, unfortunately, because the restraining checks of theology had been removed. Here again the villain is Unitarianism, which did away with the edifice of the old theology.[4]

But though Miller's thesis is very ingenious, the emergence of what is most distinctive in Emerson's thought cannot be explained by its resemblance to the Puritans. He did not detect the relation himself until 1841, when he had already begun to qualify his leading ideas. It was out of Unitarianism that Emerson's enthusiasm sprang, and the predecessor with whom he has the most in common is not Edwards, or even Coleridge or Carlyle, but Channing. In both Channing and Emerson the religious and aesthetic impulses fortified each other; and the two men tended to relate religion to literature in similar ways.

This study, then, will attempt to show Emerson's leading ideas about literary expression as determined yet animated by spiritual conceptions, considering his synthesis of religious and aesthetic concerns as a development from the Unitarian milieu. Since the literary aspect of this development has not been fully understood, and since, for the reasons mentioned above, Emerson's literary ideas themselves need to be reappraised, I hope that this study will help to clarify Emerson's philosophy of art.

CHAPTER I

"THE POETRY OF THE OLD CHURCH IS THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE NEW"

Emerson's mind comes of age about 1831 and the journals and letters of the previous years show that this emergence was both gradual and sudden. All his leading ideas appear by 1824, yet there is little real advance for five years or more, when all at once his style sharpens, his tone becomes firmer, and insights come to him in a rush. A growing sense of self-reliance, a confidence that God is supporting him from within, quickens this development, affecting Emerson's idea of literature and art as strongly as his religion or philosophy, by helping him to resolve two problems with which he wrestles in the early journals: his fondness for literature vs. his suspicions about its frivolity and the discrepancy between his literary avocation and his chosen calling.[1]

In middle age, Emerson remembered himself as "a little chubby boy trundling a hoop in Chauncy Place, and spouting poetry from Scott and Campbell at the Latin School" (J, VI, 305). The author of a metrical romance by the age of ten, he would neglect his homework for the sake of versifying and amuse himself by writing letters in rhyme to his brothers and friends (L, I, 15, passim). During his teens he wrote poetry more freely than he ever did again. At school and college, he had the opportunity to read his poems at exhibitions and, as is well-known, was class poet at Harvard--after, that is, "'seven others had been asked who positively refused.'"[2] He also twice won Bowdoin second prizes for prose compositions.

Much of this juvenillia has been preserved.[3] The poetry was the kind he later stigmatized as "fit to put round frosted cake" (CW, V, 255); his favorite form was a clock-like heroic couplet. His earliest ideas about literature, too, were as neoclassical as those of The Boston Anthology and Monthly Review, the magazine his father had begun editing the year after Emerson was born.[4] Johnson's Lives of the Poets was the first piece of criticism we know he read (L, I, 10-11), and traces of the eighteenth century point of view appear in his journals and letters until about 1826. Yet Emerson's youthful favorites among the more recent poets were not authors like Dryden and Pope but Scott and Byron.[5] The style of his own poetry, from the time of "Good-Bye" (1824), became more and more personal, as the devices of neoclassical rhetoric dwindled to a minimum.[6] He virtually stopped using the heroic couplet soon after he left Harvard, though he occasionally reverted to it afterwards.

This early interest in poetry and poets was intense but not deeply serious. At one point Byron's glamorous life made Emerson think wishfully of becoming a poet himself (L, I, 63), but for the most part he seems to have regarded verse as a delightful but rather frivolous form of amusement. "We love poetry," he writes during a long and interesting journal entry of 1822, "as we do the flowers of the field because they supply not the necessaries but the luxuries of life." It satisfies because of its remoteness, because it makes its own world, because it can "abate or amuse [our] weariness of life" (JMN, I, 277). Poetry is a "fine intellectual pastime," the composing of which is especially delightful because it costs "none of that sore labour which constructs a mathematical train" and produces in the poet "a pleasing momentary delerium which comes over him that surrounds him with paradise and charms him with the idea that he hath created it" (JMN, I, 280, 281).

Yet at the same time, this passage is a serious defense of poetry, on the ground that the mind requires it. "Liberal views of the philosophy of poetry find its adaptation to the faculties of man as the link between matters of speculation and matters of fact" (JMN, I, 277). "The belief of things unseen is planted too deep and exerts a fascination too strong to be easily foregone" (JMN, I, 280). Poetry satisfies this fascination. Clearly it did so for him, at any rate. In addition to many experiments in verse and prose, the early journals contain a good deal of commentary on the techniques and uses of poetry, fiction, drama, and oratory. He makes a list of "phrases poetical" (JMN, I, 233); notes the effective use of imagery in a classmate's oration (JMN, I, 38); and speculates about the nature and history of rhyme (JMN, I, 242-243, 278-279).

The art which at this time attracts Emerson's most prolonged attention is the drama. A recurrent theme through the first seven "Wide World"'s is the excellent theory of the drama vs. its present degradation.[7] His essays on this topic perhaps best show the limitations of his early view of literature. Stimulated by Thomas Campbell's opinion that the drama was the art most likely to flourish in America (JMN, I, 260, 269), Emerson set himself to thinking about how it could be reformed, though he himself had never seen the inside of a playhouse. (Harvard students were forbidden to go.)[8] His main ideas are that the drama is potentially the most useful, because most popular, of all the arts. Because it most easily delights, therefore it can be the most effective instrument for moral influence. In classical days, the drama was noble and full of lofty sentiments, but it was endangered by Shakespeare, who introduced the portrayal of vulgarity and vice, and was corrupted by Shakespeare's successors, who imitated his faults. The present licentiousness of the drama, he thinks, should be easily reformable in America, whose citizens are more upright than the English.

In his mature work, Emerson paid very little attention to the drama as such; he preferred to regard Shakespeare and other dramatists he admired as poets. Yet he never outgrew the bias of his early view, which peeps through at the end of his essay on Shakespeare in Representative Men, and in other places where he criticizes Shakespeare for writing to delight rather than instruct.[9] Though Shakespeare was very likely his favorite writer, and he even grew to like Beaumont and Fletcher, whom he was deploring for looseness as late as 1833 (JMN, IV, 73), he always insisted on literature's moral end, though he deepened his idea of those ends.

The same issue that preöccupies Emerson's youthful criticism of the drama appears in his indecision about his calling. Nearing his twenty-first birthday, he struggles in his journal with the question central "to each new Citizen of the world:" "shall I subdue my mind by discipline, or obey its native inclination? govern my imagination with rules or cherish its originality? Shall I cultivate Reason or

Fancy?" (JMN, II, 219). The well-known entry for May 25, 1824, shows that he has decided on the first alternative but bases his hopes for success on the second. He believes that he may be a successful preacher, because "the highest species of reasoning upon divine subjects is rather the fruit of a sort of moral imagination than of the 'Reasoning Machines' such as Locke & Clarke & David Hume. Dr Channing's Dudleian Lecture ['On the Evidences of Revealed Religion'] is the model of what I mean, and the faculty which produced this is akin to the higher flights of the fancy" (JMN, II, 238).

As Stephen Whicher notes, "It is not hard to see that what is genuine in this declaration is literary."[10] Emerson has decided to become a poet in the pulpit. His most fervent early declaration of commitment is, in fact, a poem, "The Summons" (1825), a ceremonious farewell to "Books, Muses, Study, fireside, friends and love"--"all those toys" of childhood--"to obey / The King whose meek ambassador I go" (CW, IX, 385).[11] Even here the tone is wistful. During his trip south, in 1827, when he composes a good deal of verse, he writes his Aunt Mary Emerson, "When I chance to light on a verse of genuine poetry . . . a forcible sympathy awakens a legion of little goblins in the recesses of the soul, and if I had the leisure to attend to the fine tiny rabble I should straightway be a poet" (L, I, 198). And when in the spring of 1829 he records his first thoughts for two sermons on the office of a Christian minister, like Stephen Dedalus, it is really the artist which he describes:

> It is his to see the creation with a new eye, to behold what he thought unorganized, crystallize into form, to see the stupendous

> temple uplift its awful form, towers on
> towers into infinite space, echoing all
> with rapturous hymns.
> (JMN, III, 152)

To be sure, from 1826-1832 and in particular during his pastorate at the Second Church, Emerson's literary efforts are largely confined to pulpit eloquence and sermon writing. Had preaching been his only responsibility, the ministry might have contented him as much or more than lecturing did later; even as it was, Emerson by no means found it easy to break with his congregation.[12] By the time he did, however, he could turn to a secular literary vocation without feeling guilty, for his idea of a religious calling had broadened to include it. The change in Emerson's view of the nature of poetry is an example of his change of mind.

From his youth, Emerson had a special liking for "impassioned poetry" (JMN, I, 281); thus he admired Campbell and Byron and censured Wordsworth in the early twenties as "the poet of pismires" (JMN, I, 162).[13] "We love better to follow the poet when the muse is so etherial and the thought so sublime that language sinks beneath it" (JMN, I, 65). Two years later, in a very well-expressed passage--which, however, is crossed out--Emerson begins by distinguishing passion as that which separates poetry from prose (JMN, I, 63).

But Emerson is at first suspicious of poetic flights. When he praises them, he must remind himself afterward that such enthusiasm can be disastrous (JMN, I, 65). In one place, he proposes to write an essay "on the evils of imagination. The detriment brought by it to Xn. cause; in history & at present" (JMN, I, 203). Yet as early as 1822, he begins to show a higher view of poetic imagination, observing that Milton resembled the martyrs in being assisted in his work by the Holy Spirit (JMN, II, 106-107). Milton, who after all had invoked the "Heav'nly Muse," was always for him the best example of the moral imagination in literature, as he was also for Dr. Channing, who in 1826 announced his perfect agreement with Milton's estimate of his poetry as a kind of divine inspiration.[14]

In an 1826 letter to his aunt, Emerson admits his indecision about poetry and asks her opinion of "its general nature and value" (J, II, 105). Do you outgrow it or grow into it? he wonders. Towards the end of the letter, much of which is a criticism of Wordsworth, he expresses his puzzlement in a rhetorical passage:

> What is poetry? It is philosophy, it is humour, it is a chime of two or three syllables, it is a relation of thought to things, or of language to thought. It converses with all science and all imagination, with all accidents and objects, from the grandest that are accessible to the senses, and grander than those, to the coarsest parts of life. And I would go to the farthest verge of the green earth to learn what it was or was not (J, II, 110).

It is doubtful whether Mary Emerson's reply, now lost, could have been too helpful, for her opinion was mixed in the same way as his. She too had no patience with verse which was merely amusing, but had the same love of the moral imagination; in cases such as Byron she was similarly attracted and repelled. She certainly did not want her nephew to become a poet, but she believed that "the Poet who is fired with love of virtue, & writes to spread its flame, is among the higher order of benefactors to mankind."[15] In any case, when Emerson returns to the subject in a letter of the following year, he suggests with more confidence that "there is in all souls an original affinity to the elements of" poetry; a religious person must speak of it "with reverence for it links itself to whatever is brightest & most permanent in his nature" (L, I, 199). This thought is expressed still more strongly in a journal entry of 1828: to read the "pervading etherial poesy" of the great writers from Shakespeare to Milton opens "glimpses of the heaven that is in the intellect. When I am caught by a magic word & drop the book to explore the infinite charm . . . I feel the longevity of the mind; I admit the evidence of the immortaility of the soul" (JMN, III, 148).

After this entry there is almost no journal discussion of literature for two and one-half years. But when Emerson again returns to the theme of poetry's relation to the soul, in the spring of 1831, it is to express excitedly the insight which marks the end of his early speculations and the beginning of his later ideas about poetry and the poet. Milton is again the example: "What shall forbid us to universalize the operation of God & to believe the operation of the Holy Spirit is the same in kind in the prophet Isaiah as in the poet Milton?" (JMN, III, 240).[16] From this point on, Emerson is fully prepared to develop the idea of the poet as inspired prophet, based on the assurance that God is within the individual soul.

This entry is one of a series of discoveries which make the journals from the fall of 1830 to the summer of 1831 the turning point in Emerson's intellectual development. For example, on October 27, 1830, Emerson begins taking notes on Degerando's Histoire Comparee, where he meets, perhaps for the first time, the Baconian concept of the "first philosophy," which inspires him to his first jottings on the doctrine of one mind (JMN, V, 269-276). On November 19, he notes for the first time Coleridge's distinction between genius and talent (JMN, III, 211). On March 13, 1831, he first contrasts the terms "reason" and "understanding" in their Coleridgian senses (JMN, III, 236); on March 4 comes the passage identifying the inspirations of Milton and Isaiah; and nine days later, he makes another new assertion central to his later thought, that "more genius does not increase the individuality but the community of each mind" (JMN, III, 240). No one of these entries is extremely significant by itself, as all could have been predicted from earlier journals, but together they can be said to mark a turning point in Emerson's thought.

"Gnothi Seauton" (know thyself), a poem--or rather a collection of thoughts in verse--dated July 6, 1831, expresses the sum of these new insights and has rightly been taken as a kind of symbolic climax to Emerson's development.[17] By the same token, a much shorter poem, which follows it by two pages in the journal, reflects Emerson's new attitude toward poetry:

> A dull uncertain brain
> But gifted yet to know
> That God has Seraphim who go
> Singing an immortal strain
> Immortal here below
> I know the mighty bards
> I listen when they sing
> And more I know
> The Secret store
> Which these explore
> When they with torch of genius pierce
> The tenfold clouds that cover
> The riches of the Universe
> From God's adoring lover.
> And if to me it is not given

To fetch one ingot thence
Of that unfading gold of heaven
His merchants may dispense
Yet well I know the royal mine
And know the sparkle of its ore
Celestial truths from lies that shine
Explored they teach us to explore.
(JMN, III, 294-295)[18]

The language of the poem strikes one by contrast to "Gnothi Seauton:" from the imagery alone the reader would hardly know that Emerson has recently located God within the self: 'Seraphim," "here below," clouds," and "celestial" all suggest the traditional cosmology and the chief metaphor seems to go little farther than a trite comparison of bards to angels.[19] However, the journal context interprets the lines "And more I know / The Secret store / Which these explore." The speaker's discovery has given him access to the bards' source of power, even if he cannot begin to equal them. Praise and admiration for the poet's role at its highest, with humility about his own talents were to remain Emerson's attitude ever afterwards.[20]

Self-reliance applied to literature thus gave the possibility of higher meaning to the "momentary delirium" of the poet; indirectly it also pushed Emerson in the direction of a literary vocation. Starting in the summer of 1832, there is an upsurge of journal commentary on literature, much of which is collected in later 1832 or 1833 in a notebook entitled "Composition" (JMN, IV, 427-438). As early as January 1832, Emerson was making plans for a book (JMN, III, 315-316), and upon resigning from his pastorate, his first plans, confided to his brother William, were literary (L, I, 358). But the transition was slow--Emerson kept on preaching regularly until 1838--and at all events the change of professions was mostly a change of means, not of values, from 1831 on. As he wrote his congregation, "I should be unfaithful to myself, if any change of circumstances could diminish my devotion to the cause of divine truth" (L, I, 357), explaining to himself that "to be a good minister it was necessary to leave the ministry. The profession is antiquated" (JMN, IV, 27). Having done so, he proceeded to make use of his particular set of gifts. A successful preacher, he became even more so in the lyceum, which he liked to call his "pulpit." A contributor to The Christian Disciple and its successor The Christian Examiner, and a published poet,[21] he had become a writer, but his main subject remained the spiritual life. In the well-known letter to his fiancee in 1835, when he first characterizes himself as a poet "in the sense of a perceiver & dear lover of the harmonies that are in the soul & matter, & specially of the correspondences between these & those" (L, I, 435), he is really just translating into a slightly different language the sense of the minister's office given in this passage from 1829: "'Tis his to show the beauty of the moral laws of the Universe . . . to watch the Divinity in his world; to detect his footstep . . ." (JMN, III, 152). Lecture, verse, or essay, Emerson remained "a priest of the soul," "an affirmer of the One law, yet as one who should affirm it in music or dancing" (J, V, 567).

The breadth of Emerson's interests and his mixed disposition made it impossible for him ever to embrace any one profession without second thoughts. As Henry Nash Smith, Stephen Whicher, and others have pointed out, during the 1830's Emerson continued to adjust his opinion of how to realize his ambitions, in particular how to be a man of action without ceasing to be true to his ideals. Whicher considers that Emerson's reaction to the hostile reception of "The Divinity School Address," as hinted in "Uriel," was the turning point in a lapse from incipient reformer to solitary observer.[22] Smith argues that Emerson had definitely made his choice by 1841.[23] On the other hand, from Emerson's later efforts in behalf of emancipation, it is clear that he did always remain a mere observer. But though in a sense Emerson never completely resolved the problem of vocation in his mind or in his writing, it is obvious that after his return from Europe in 1833 he is headed toward a career as a man of letters. From this time on, he writes only six more sermons (YES, 270-271), but within eighteen months gives two lecture courses, comes into his own as a poet,[24] and begins work on his first book, Nature.

ii

"The priest departs, the divine literatus comes," Walt Whitman announced in 1871.[25] An admirer of Emerson might well apply this statement to the career of his hero and the aspirations, if not the achievement, of transcendentalism as a whole. For though it was first of all a religious movement, transcendentalism, as its first historian wrote, "was essentially poetical and put its thoughts naturally into song."[26] In order to see how Emerson derived the basis for a literary philosophy from a religious insight and, by extension, to see the debt of the New England literary renaissance to a club of liberal clergymen, it is helpful to examine the connection between religion and aesthetics in the criticism of the preceding period.

That there is an intimate connection between the Unitarian movement and the rise of imaginative literature that soon followed has often been suggested but never very thoroughly analyzed. Clearly, the main impetus behind the first, namely the shift from a Calvinist view of human nature as depraved to an Arminian view of man as improvable,[27] also helped produce a climate of opinion more favorable to the arts. In his pioneering study of American periodical criticism between 1810-1835, William Charvat has observed that in literary articles during these years "the negative principle of religious restraint was slowly displaced by the positive principle of moral idealism." The reviewer's question changed from "'Does this book make vice attractive?'" to "'Does it make virtue beautiful?'" The rise of the latter principle, he notes, prepared the way for the moral enthusiasm of the romantic period in American letters.[28]

After 1830, Charvat is careful to point out, the movement was by no means confined to Unitarian critics, but it was they who initiated it.[29] A significant early example is Andrews Norton's report in The North American Review in 1818 of the inaugural address of Harvard Professor Levi Frisbie, one of Emerson's teachers. Frisbie went out of his way to stress how imaginative literature has "'a most extensive and powerful operation upon the moral feelings and character of the age.'" Because of its appeal to emotions, literature can easily pervert the character; Frisbie condemns Byron in particular as a pernicious influence. Yet, he says, though literature can be an agent for evil, "'it may be rendered no less powerful, as a means of good.'" Cowper, Campbell, and (with strong reservations) Maria Edgeworth are cited as examples; and Frisbie praises the practice of the Edinburgh Review in combining literary with moral judgments as one sign "'that within the last century a decided and important improvement in the moral character of our literature has taken place.'"[30]

Frisbie's comments on literature and the fact that Norton exerpts them are of special interest because they occur in a discourse which is mainly about the improvability of man and the importance of educating the moral sense. Indeed, as I hope to suggest in this section, as religion seemed to become more and more a matter of morals and spiritual improvement, the causes of religion and art became increasingly related, until, in Emerson, the latter came to be seen as the more natural expression of the religious spirit.

Evidence to support this hypothesis can be culled from the North American, New England's leading literary magazine from the period 1815-1835,[31] but even more from The Christian Disciple (1813-1824) and its successor The Christian Examiner (1824-), America's chief periodical of Unitarian thought during those years,[32] and most of all from the writings of William Ellery Channing, the most eminent and most liberal of the early Unitarian writers, and also the principal influence among them upon the literary and religious philosophy of the next generation.[33] The following discussion, therefore, will refer to the North American when it is useful, center around the attitudes expressed in the Disciple and Examiner, but emphasize particularly Channing's contributions, as well as his other works.

Frequent articles appear in the Disciple and Examiner stressing the importance of art to religion in three areas: church music, preaching and religious literature, and imaginative literature.

Church music is the subject of at least thirteen articles between 1813-1832, one of them by Emerson.[34] Most of these take the form of longish letters to the editor or reviews of hymnbooks. In general the articles call for an improvement in the quality of church music and stress its importance to the worship service. The consensus is that music has improved during the previous decades, but that the quality of singing among choirs and congregations is poor, some of the hymns are doctrinally unacceptable, and the sound and sense in church music need to be better coordinated.[35]

Most of these articles call attention to the importance of music in evoking and elevating the religious sentiments. The most careful and extended discussion of the subject is a three-part review by Emerson's friend and predecessor in the pulpit of the Second Church, Henry Ware, Jr.[36] The first part is particularly interesting. Ware cautions that in the service music used only for show or to exhibit the skill of the performer is worse than no music at all, but he argues that "music, when judiciously and expressively performed, descends into the soul with the sentiments it breathes, and wakens emotions corresponding to the language of the hymn;" thus it is capable of producing an effect more powerful than oratory, "in as much as the voice in singing makes a more thrilling appeal to the feelings than in speaking."[37]

The difference between Ware's and a transcendentalist opinion of music, as given by John Sullivan Dwight, is considerable. For Dwight, music is inherently "religious and prophetic;" it cannot, he says, express corruption without ceasing to be music; it is "God's alphabet" and the "natural language" of the religious sentiment. "How could there be a religion without music?" he asks.[38] By identifying music with the sentiment it awakens and calling both divine, Dwight brings together what Ware carefully keeps apart. Nevertheless, Ware prepares the way for Dwight by defining music primarily for its tendency to spiritualize, to help the mind "ascend . . . to God in the feeling and sentiment of the hymn."[39]

"Serious Preaching" is the subject of a five-part article beginning in the first volume of the Disciple.[40] The anonymous writer contends that a great weakness in contemporary preaching is that ministers involve themselves in abstract theological questions rather than dealing with the "*practical* truths of religion," namely those things which make for better character, which is the main way to salvation. These things are plain and simple; consequently the minister must rely on his own imagination and originality to express them to best effect. "He will endeavor to borrow from nature, and every scene around him, similitudes and allusions, which will throw light, and beauty, and animation on his discourse." The preacher, like any man, has a fancy, and should exercise it, (though not merely for the sake of ornament,) for truth "must be embodied, brought down to [men's] senses, by illustrations and resemblances from visible objects." The parables of Jesus are the model of this.

The opinion of this article recalls Emerson's journal comment that the highest kind of reasoning on divine subjects is not by cold logic, but moral imagination. Indeed, Emerson's remarks about preaching, in his first sermon on "The Office of a Christian Minister," tally closely with those of the Disciple:

> Men imagine that the end and use of preaching is to expound a text and to unfold the divisions and subdivisions of meaning of Grace, or Justification, of Atonement, of Sanctification, and are permitted to forget that . . . religion is the home of the mind.
>
> I shall labour then . . . to use a freedom in my preaching befitting the greatness of the Gospel and its universal application to all human concerns. I shall not be so much afraid of innovations as to scruple about introducing new forms of address, new modes of illustrations, and varied allusions into the pulpit, when I believe they can be used with advantage.
>
> (YES, 27-28)

A practical eloquence was what the Unitarians sought in their preaching. The essentials of religions were considered to be the great moral truths, which are available to all,[41] and the pastor's duty therefore to set his heart to these and render them in the language of the people.[42] Emerson's kinsman Orville Dewey, surveying the great European divines of the past, praised above them Joseph Stevens Buckminster (1786-1812)--one of the precursors and saints of the Unitarian movement--for his artful simplicity in preaching "the obvious truths and principles of morality and piety."[43]

Emerson, however, could not have agreed with Dewey's contention that Jeremy Taylor's discourses, though brilliant, "do not satisfy us as sermons," because they are "too unweildy," "too various and profuse in their topics," and "want utility and point."[44] The Unitarian idea of pulpit eloquence was really more chastened than what Emerson had in mind. If it steered clear of arid dogmatism, it also excluded all forms of "enthusiasm." In particular, the Unitarians were reacting against fire-and-brimstone sermons which sought only to terrify,[45] as indeed

Emerson did too. But more than this, intellectual clarity was considered important. For instance, Alexander Everett, in an article on William Ellery Channing in the North American, cited him as a model of pulpit eloquence, and described his style as follows:

> The style is warm, vigorous and pointed, without affectation or effort at display. No writer is more sparing in the use of figures of speech, historical and poetical allusions, delineations of character and all other merely rhetorical arts.[46]

This summation is a bit exaggerated, but it suggests fairly the chief difference between Channing's style and that of the later Emerson. Channing's is at times extremely fervent, and in force of affirmation equal to Emerson's; but the two are really as different as a hen and a peacock. Here are passages from each on similar themes. Man's likeness to God, says Channing in the sermon where he is perhaps the closest in spirit to transcendentalism,

> has its foundation in the original and essential capacities of the mind. In proportion as these are unfolded by right and vigorous exertion, it is extended and brightened. In proportion as these lie dormant, it is obscured. In proportion as they are perverted and overpowered by the appetites and passions, it is blotted out.[47]

Emerson, in "The Divinity School Address," says,

> If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God: the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. If a man dissemble, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being.
> (CW, I, 122)

In substance, the two men's ideas are the same (as Channing saw), but there is a great difference in the expression. Channing tries to make his point as deliberately as possible; Emerson uses paradox and sharp antithesis (the just man is God: he goes out of acquaintance with his own being) to drive home his point. In their discourses as a whole, the difference is the same. Channing is at great pains not to lose his reader; Emerson does not even desire to stick to a firm order, preferring to speak metaphorically.

Channing regretted the lack of clarity in Emerson's address,[48] and when one considers that Channing himself was suspected of misleading by too much eloquence,[49] it is clear that an Emerson lecture not only in its content but its style, would not have been acceptable in a Unitarian pulpit. The relative straightforwardness of Emerson's own sermons, compared to his later treatment of similar topics also suggests the limitations within which he was forced to work. As early as 1830, (L, I, 344-345) he rated the colorful and spontaneous oratory of his friend Edward Taylor (Melville's Father Mapple) above Channing's "sublime" of calculation" (J, VI, 285), as he later called it.[50]

Still, the liberal tenet that "our faith should be drawn from our moral sentiments and noblest desires" rather than from creeds[51] made it more important for the preacher to arouse the spirit than to instruct. Or rather, the highest form of instruction was seen to be inspiration. A fine balance between appeals to the reason and to the affections had to be maintained; "we ask especially," Dewey wrote, "that intellect in religion may not be divorced from feeling . . . for the disunion would be fatal to the depth and permanence of all religious sentiment." But when all is said, "practical preaching" is "that preaching which arrests the mind and arouses it to moral action, whether by the discussion of duties or of doctrines."[51] Channing was also insistent on this point. In his sermon "Preaching Christ," he noted that

> Some preachers, from observing the pernicious effects of violent and exclusive appeals to the passions, have fallen into an opposite error, which has rendered the labors of their lives almost wholly unfruitful. They have addressed men as mere creatures of intellect. They have forgotten, that affection is as essential to our nature as thought . . . . Preaching, to be effectual, must be as various as our nature. The sun warms, at the same moment it enlightens; and unless religious truth be addressed at once to the reason and affections, unless it kindles whilst it guides, it is a useless splendor . . .[53]

This view was exactly the same as that of Emerson, who later saw the idea that "preaching should be as various as our nature" could also be used to support the argument that the true pulpit is not in a sectarian church at all but a lecture room. Channing himself took a significant step in this direction in an 1824 ordination sermon, "The Demands of the Age on the Ministry." "A new spirit of improvement is abroad," he says. "The imagination can no longer be confined by the acquisitions of past ages," but is everywhere struggling for reform and higher attainment. The present state of literature mirrors this discontent; men are dissatisfied with the elegant regularity of the poetry of the Augustan age and "want and demand a more thrilling note, a poetry which pierces beneath the exterior of life to the depths of the soul." Religion, Channing argues, "ought to be dispensed in accomodation to this spirit and character of our age. Men desire excitement, and religion must be communicated in a more exciting form," not only appealing to the intellect but to "the highest and profoundest sentiments of our nature.

> It must not be exhibited in the dry, pedantic divisions of a scholastic theology; nor must it be set forth and tricked out in the light draperies of an artificial rhetoric, in prettiness of style, in measured sentences, with an insipid floridness, and in the form of elegantly feeble essays. No; it must come from the soul in the language of earnest conviction and strong feeling.

"It is objected to Unitarian Christianity," Channing concludes his survey, "that it does not possess this heart-stirring energy; and if so, it will, and still more, it ought to fall; for it does not suit the spirit of our times, nor the essential and abiding spirit of human nature."[54]

In the Disciple and Examiner Channing applies his ideas about the ministry at some length to the field of religious literature. It is a great irony, he writes in an 1829 essay on Fenelon (1651-1715), "that a theme so vast, so sublime as Christianity . . . should be treated so monotonously as to be proverbially dull."[55] The chief reason for "the poverty of religious literature" he considers to be the imitativeness and timidity of the writers. "Free action has been denied to the mind, and freedom is an essential condition of growth and power." "If, as we believe, progress be the supreme law of the soul and the very aim of its creation, then no wrong can be inflicted on it so grievous, as to bind it down everlastingly to a fixed, unvarying creed . . ." Channing by no means agrees with Fenelon's views, but he admires and recommends him because "he was an original thinker, and because, though a Catholic, he was essentially free. He wrote from his own mind . . ."[56]

Channing's argument, and equally his choice of subject--a French

Catholic mystic--show that he is not using the word "literature" simply in the broad sense of "writing."[57] He is less concerned that religious writings establish doctrine than that "the writer should bring his whole strength of thought and feeling . . . reason, imagination, taste, and genius" to his subject.[58] This is underscored by his appending a discussion of the relation between literature and religion as the last part of the essay. Although his main idea here is the same as in his "Remarks on National Literature," that religion can best give depth and grace to literature, especially poetry,[59] the discussion helps to clinch the point of the earlier argument by making the relation between literature and religion seem more intimate: on the one hand religious writing should be good literature, on the other literature should be religious.

Channing's position in regard to style in religious writing is a minority report, numbered against the dull anti-Calvinist tirades and ever-more-shadowy definitions of articles of the Unitarian faith which fill much of the Examiner's pages. Channing himself was still a long way from saying that books are meant only to inspire. He too was a careful exponent of doctrines in such addresses as "Unitarian Christianity" and "The Evidences of Revealed Religion." But Channing's ambitious argument in "Fenelon" proceeds from the same assumption which informs even those articles in the magazine which now seem the most dessicated: the letter killeth, the spirit restores. Essentially religion is the progress of the soul and this, rather than creeds and doctrines of themselves, should be the ultimate object of preaching and religious literature. "We think it better," said a Disciple analyst of the rich but ambiguous language of the Bible, "that truth, mixed with a little error, should be made to influence the hearts and lives of men, than that truth, pure, cold, and abstract, should enter unwilling ears, or reamin neglected in dusty volumes."[61]

The attitude of the magazine's contributors toward imaginative literature is fundamentally the same as toward the other subjects discussed above: art is considered important only so far as it promotes a moral or spiritual end. This proscription is also true for the North American and all other periodicals of the day.[61] But within this limit, art is often quite sensitively weighed and appreciated. Indeed, the special interest of this branch of Disciple and Examiner criticism is the great flexibility of the limit, particularly in the articles of Dr. Channing.

Though at first a religious magazine exclusively, the Disciple soon introduced reviews of literature, the first one, a brief mention of Lydia Huntley's "Moral Pieces in Prose and Verse," appearing in the third volume (1815). Here the reviewer recommends the book for the same reason Levi Frisbie attaches such importance to literature; poetry, the writer notes, "has been successfully used to disseminate licentious principles and countenance the indulgence of degrading passions. If employed in favor of morality and religion, why should its effects be less?"[62] The same idea of "the reciprocal influence of letters and morals" is also used a few years later as an apology for a 15-page review of James Percival's Prometheus, the longest literary article in the Disciple.[63] With the third issue of the Examiner, which has three long reviews, including Channing's famous essay on Milton, the literary article begins to become a staple of the magazine.

Much of the Examiner criticism does not get far beyond pronouncing on the chasteness and correctness of the piece reviewed. "The moral character, or the effect upon the mind, must be the test" of the work, as one writer said;[64] and most make a point of emphasizing that literature cannot be divorced from this higher purpose, though their vocabulary differs. Louisa Hall, reviewing the poetry of Felicia Hemans --a Byronic but pious British poet who was extraordinarily popular in America during the 1820's and 30's--writes variations on the theme that "the highest gratification from [art] can be afforded, only when the faculties of the mind are employed about subjects worthy of the intellectual and moral nature of man."[65] Mrs. Hemans passes the test, as she does also for George Bancroft, whose review of her in the North American likewise expatiates on the relation of morals to letters, but adds a nationalistic tinge: in America, he says, "it has thus far been an undisputed axiom, that if a production is indecent or immoral, it for that very reason cannot claim to be considered beautiful."[66] The author of The Bravo is denied the name of genius by Emerson's kinsman Orville Dewey, because "there is expressed by that word . . . a fulness of perfection a moral as well as intellectual grandeur . . . which we cannot ascribe to Mr. Cooper."[67] Schiller is criticized by Frederick Henry Hedge for lacking "philosophic wisdom," that quality higher than the poet which the great poet must possess;[68] and Channing, forecasting Emerson, warns that "genius is preparing for itself a sepulchre, when it disjoins itself from the Universal Mind."[69]

These strictures suggest, however, the high aspirations for the right kind of literature which even the more conservative critics held. For example, W.B.O. Peabody, who lamented "The Decline of Poetry" from "the good old way of Milton, Dryden and Pope" in the North American, writes in an 1826 review of Anna Laetitia Barbauld: "We consider poetry as not distantly related to religion. They seem to spring up and grow together; they are alike in their tendency, which is to raise the thoughts and feelings above the level of ordinary life. Exalted as religion is, it is not degraded by this alliance . . ."[70] Though Peabody here chastises Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley (for wasting their talents from excess) while praising Addison and Johnson,[71] the comparison he draws is no different from that of the best and most liberal of the early Examiner critics, Channing, whose article on Milton appears in the same issue of the Examiner. Poetry, Channing declares, "in its legitimate and highest efforts, . . . has the same tendency and aim with Christianity; that is, to spiritualize our nature." He too believes that poetry is the highest expression of the soul. Channing expresses his agreement with Milton's opinion that "of all God's gifts of intellect . . . poetical genius [is] the most transcendent," a kind of divine inspiration.[72]

Channing's demonstration of the divine nature of poetry is remarkable for the way its assumptions about religion lead to a conclusion about poetry which is unmistakeably Emersonian. "No doctrine is more common among Christians than that of man's immortality," he begins, "but it is not so generally understood, that the germs or principles of his whole future are now wrapped up in his soul," as the plant is contained in its seed. Consequently, the soul "is perpetually stretching beyond what is present and visible . . . and seeking relief and joy in imaginings of unseen and ideal being. This view of our nature . . . carries us to the very foundation and sources of poetry." "In an intellectual nature, framed for progress and for higher modes of being, there must be creative energies, powers of original and ever-growing thought; and poetry is the form in which these energies are chiefly manifested." The poet draws his materials from "the worlds of matter and mind" and recreates them anew "for the gratification of a divine instinct." Therefore, although poetry may be in a sense false, "it observes higher laws than it transgresses" and "far from injuring society is one of the great instruments of its refinement and exaltation."[73]

Channing's article, and particularly this section of it, is of considerable importance. Emerson came to consider the essay a landmark in American criticism (CW, X, 339), and in 1842 wrote in his journal that it "contained the true doctrine of Inspiration: 'Milton observes higher laws than he transgresses'" (J, VI, 271). Though there is no proof he read "Milton" when it was published, it is very likely he did, since both Mary Emerson and his brother Charles read it.[74] Bryant quoted a long passage (on the importance of poetry to society) to conclude a lecture on "The Value and Uses of Poetry."[75] And Alexander Everett, in his 1835 review of Channing, gave the highest praise to "Milton" and singled out the passage on the nature of poetry as "the most powerful" of the discussions in the essay.[76]

No other early Examiner critic defends poetry on so high a ground as Channing. For the most part, poetry is considered a "humbler inspiration"[77] or "something bordering upon inspiration."[78] When poetry is compared to religion by Peabody, or to prophecy, as it is dsewhere,[79] the purpose is for analogy, not, as in Channing, for argument. This is true also of the discussions of the nature of poetry in the North American of the same period; notably in Ephraim Peabody's "American Poems" (1829) and Longfellow's "Defence of Poetry" (1832), they suggest the theory of divine inspiration and its connection with poetry, but do not espouse it as warmly as Channing does.[80] On the contrary, Alexander Everett, in his review of Channing, suggests that Channing confuses the two domains of religion and poetry.[81]

Nevertheless, Channing's argument is only a somewhat spectacular extension of the general feeling in the Examiner that literature (especially poetry), music, and eloquence are important instruments in the furtherance of religion. This belief, in turn, proceeds from the idea that the furtherance of religion is essentially a matter of directing the sentiments to spiritual improvement. To a mind like W.B.O. Peabody's, who reacts similarly and sharply against religious and romantic enthusiasm,[82] or a literalist like J. T. Austin, whose review of Bulwer-Lytton condemns Paul Clifford solely because the hero is a villain,[83] art would naturally boil down to a standard of taste and religion to a code of ethics. Emerson's youthful remarks on the drama show this point of view. But it was also possible for bolder minds, sensitive to the power of imaginative expression and confident in the improvability of the individual soul, to approach the question whether the arts were not potentially more religious than religion itself, the poet's calling more sacred than the priests.

Channing himself would never have gone so far as to say with

Emerson, the poet "is the true and only doctor" (CW, III, 8). This was not possible so long as one held revealed religion, at least in theory, higher than natural religion and exalted Christ above humanity; these two distinctive points in classical Unitarianism, as O. B. Frothingham acutely notes, were what separated Channing from the transcendentalists, however much he may have sympathized with them in feeling.[84] But the idea of man's likeness to God, the notion that the seed of his immortality is contained within him, which is the basis for Channing's defense of the divine nature of poetry, is different only in degree from Emerson's idea of inspiration as following from the self-sufficiency of the soul.[85]

iii

In Emerson's version of self-reliance, creation becomes the soul's main duty. If man is capable of an original relation to the universe, he should therefore build his own world; this is the conclusion of Nature. "To create, to create is the proof of a Divine presence. Whoever creates is God, and whatever talents are, if the man create not, the pure efflux of Deity is not his" (JMN, V, 341). The emphasis which Emerson thereby places on the active soul often makes him rate the poet above the preacher as the representative of religion. "God, the moral element, must ever be new, an electric spark; then it agitates and deifies us. The instant when it is fixed and made chronic, it is hollowness and cant. It is the difference between poets and preachers" (J, VI, 509).

"The Divinity School Address" is Emerson's most forcible statement of this contrast and its implications. The main argument of the first and more famous half is that the soul, or in particular the religious sentiment, is the foundation of all religion; this foundation is within the individual and cannot be supplied second-hand; and so the ritual and dogma of historical Christianity are encumbrances to religion when held to for their own sake. The second half Emerson appropriately directs to the class of young ministers, advising them how to preach religion as he sees it.

In both parts the analogy of poetry is employed by Emerson to make his points. The prophets, including Jesus, he regards as "holy bards." These men, he says, inspired by the religious sentiment uttered sayings which express this piety and "are sacred and permanent in proportion to their purity" (CW, I, 126). Jesus' assertion that he was God and that we shall see God through him is an example of this sort, spoken in a "jubilee of sublime emotion." His words, like all "doctrine of the Reason," have been corrupted into a doctrine of the understanding. "The understanding caught this high chant from the poet's lips" and made the dogma that Jesus was God. "The idioms of his language and the figures of his rhetoric have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes. Christianity became a Mythus, as the poetic teaching of Greece and of Egypt, before" (129).[86]

Jesus, Emerson affirms, had no disrespect for the earlier prophets, but he was a true man: he was self-reliant (129-130); and by the same token we should not worship his person but respect ourselves (130-132). "The divine bards are the friends of my virtue, of my intellect, of my strength," he says. "They admonish me that the gleams which flash across my mind are not mine, but God's." But "Thus, by his holy thoughts, Jesus serves us, and thus only." Not by miracles but "by the reception of beautiful sentiments" is true religion born in the soul (132).

Going on to attack the authority of revelation, Emerson argues that this is not merely historical but directly available to the individual. Moreover, the sense of God in the soul begets "a desire and need to impart to others the same knowledge and love. If utterance is denied, the thought lies like a burden on the man. Always the seer is a sayer. Somehow his dream is told; somehow he publishes it with solemn joy: sometimes with pencil on canvas, sometimes with chisel on stone, sometimes in towers and aisles of granite, his soul's worship is builded; sometimes in anthems of indefinite music; but clearest and most permanent, in words." This lyrical passage, which in context equates art with worship, leads Emerson into a commentary on the office of the divine "priest or poet" which his hearers are about to assume (134). He had already said the same things to the divinity students who had visited him that spring (JMN, V, 471). Here he criticizes the present church for timidity and formalism; remembering the dull sermons of his own pastor at Concord, he asserts that the true preacher is he who converts experience into truth, who "deals out to the people his life, --life passed through the fire of his thought" (138).[87] "Yourself a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost," he exhorts, "cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first hand with Deity" (146). In conclusion, he says, "I look for the hour when that supreme Beauty which ravished the souls of those Eastern men, and chiefly of those Hebrews, and through their lips spoke oracles to all time, shall speak in the West also." He hopes even for an improvement of the sacred scriptures: "The Hebrews and Greek Scriptures contain immortal sentences, that have been bread of life to millions. But they have no epical integrity; are fragmentary; are not shown in their order to the intellect. I look for the new Teacher"--"some moral Bard," he had written in the journal version (JMN, V, 466)--that shall follow so far those shining laws that he shall see them come full circle; shall see their rounding complete grace . . ." (151).

Looking at the address as a whole, we see that Emerson at first uses the analogy of poetry pejoratively, to diminish the authority of historical Christianity. The prophets' utterances are only poetry; they are meant to inspire us, but not to have authority over us. On the other hand, Emerson is also calling for a priesthood of prophet-poets in the present day; such type of utterance, taken in the proper spirit, is what he really desires. He wants the Bible read as literature, solely to inspire,[88] while at the same time he wants new and better Bibles written by inspired contemporaries. His emphasis on originality and creativity makes art a much better theater for the production of new bibles than the institutionalized church.

This, of course, is not to say that the high poetry Emerson recommends is belletristic. As Charles Foster says in an interesting article which takes "The American Scholar" as a point of departure, Emerson is urging "not so much a program for an American literature as a program for an American scripture." "The center for him was religion, not literary effects."[89] Unlike Bryant, Emerson could never have written on the subject of "Trisyllabic Feet in Iambic Measure," or regarded poetical genius as a quality of secondary importance, dependent on the accumulated achievements of the art of poetry down through the ages.[90] Emerson's ideas were really a continuation of those of the Examiner critics. Literature remained valuable to him for "the feeling of Immortality it awakens" (J, V, 340). "It is the office of poets," he wrote in 1855,"to suggest a vast wealth, a background, a divinity, out of which all this and much more readily springs; and if this religion is in the poetry, it raises us to some purpose, and we can well afford some staidness or gravity in the verses" (J, VIII, 532-533). Significantly, Emerson began his next lecture on literature after "The Divinity School Address" by asserting that "the highest originality must be moral" (J, V, 334), that consequently the Bible and other sacred Scriptures are the only really original books, compared to which even Shakespeare is secondary.[91] "When we speak of Poet in the great sense," Emerson wrote in 1842, "we seem to be driven to such examples as Ezekiel and Saint John and Menu with their moral burdens; and all those we commonly call Poets become rhymesters and poetasters by their side" (J, VI, 191), and he wove the observation into "Poetry and Imagination" thirty years later (CW, VIII, 65).

But for Emerson letters was nevertheless the best means to his spiritual purpose, for two general reasons. Freedom, first of all. Even though he advised the divinity students to "let the breath of new life be breathed by you through the forms already existing" (CW, I, 150), he himself had already declared that he would "not preach more except from the Lyceum" (L, II, 120). "I wish to be a true & free man," he had written in 1834, "& therefore would not be a woman, or a king, or a clergyman, each of which classes in the present order of things is a slave" (JMN, IV, 306). For some time he had been writing enthusiastically about the "new pulpit" and its "new literature." "I see not why this is not the most flexible of all organs of opinion," he told Carlyle," from its popularity & from its newness permitting you to say what you think." "The orator is only responsible for what his lips articulate" (E-C, 143). In the pulpit, "I sustain no other relation than that of preacher, But I preach in the Lecture-Room and then it tells, for there is no prescription. You may laugh, weep, reason, sing, sneer, or pray, according to your genius" (E-C, 171).

In his lecture on "The Poet," Emerson noted a related advantage of verse over prose as a vehicle of religious truth. Like music, it has "certain rights of sanctuary." The poet has a kind of immunity: "You shall not speak truth in prose. You may in verse." Therefore "poetry serves a great office to mankind in keeping before the mind of the most critical & unbelieving age those cardinal truths & ideas which make the religion of man, and which would be rejected & insulted, if stated in the newspaper, but when spoken in verse disarm criticism, and for the music's sake & are allowed currency in the circles most committed to an opposite creed,--where they serve to mitigate & modify manners & laws, & keep the door open to a better knowledge. So that it has been well said by those who hope highest of the present time, that 'the poetry of the Old Church is the philosophy of the New.'"[92] The freedom of the lyceum which Emerson so liked is greater still in poetry, and, we could say, in Emerson's brand of poetic prose.

The second reason for Emerson's preference of literature was aesthetic. Emerson plainly told the students in the introductory lecture of his course at Harvard that Plato,Kant, and other philosophers "had vast compass. But in the attempt to realize it, the theory of all Being,--they lose our delight. The result is only a partial triumph . . ."[93] They failed by leaving out beauty, which is "the form under which the intellect prefers to study the world" (CW, VI, 287). The transcendentalist, Emerson said in 1841, prefers to make Beauty the head of the eternal trinity in which Goodness and Truth are the other members, and he gave his own endorsement in adding, "We call the Beautiful the highest, because it appears to us the golden mean, escaping the dowdiness of the good and the heartlessness of the true" (CW, I, 355). The fault of Theodore Parker's addresses, Emerson wrote years later, was "that there was no beauty" (J, IX, 272).

Emerson's praise of beauty is based on the awareness that truth and goodness have a distorted meaning when merely stated as abstract propositions or moral imperatives; they must be related to experience to be understood and believed in earnest. Though he characteristically thought of beauty in platonic terms--as the face or "flowering of virtue"--in sensing its importance to the expression of truth he is a product of the intellectual development we have been tracing and also a precursor of such modern artist-philosophers as Neitzsche and Camus. The ideal poet for Emerson is "the reconciler," who can express his vision through materials taken from the ordinary and characteristic features of contemporary life (CW, III, 37f). The importance and the difficulty of achieving such a combination is stressed by the contrast between Shakespeare and Swedenborg in Representative Men. "For executive faculty, for creation, Shakespeare is unique;" his power of expression is incomparable (CW, IV, 212), but he had no conscious interest beyond beauty and amusement (CW, IV, 217f). Swedenborg was a seer and lawgiver, but his mind was warped by "its theologic determination" and so his work is often dull and ugly (CW, IV, 134). At the end of "Shakespeare," Emerson is forced to conclude that "the world still wants its poet-priest, a reconciler, who shall not trifle, with Shakespeare the player, nor shall grope in graves, with Swedenborg the mourner; but who shall see, speak, and act, with equal inspiration" (CW, IV, 219).

Emerson, then, took up the call made by Channing for a literature based upon "a new action or development of the religious principle."[94] He went beyond Channing in using letters itself, rather than the ministry, as his chief field of operation; and yet, as Charles Metzger writes, "it was his religious conception as much as his literary inclination which divorced him from the clergy and at the same time suggested to him that he should become a poet."[95] This background quite naturally makes for an ambivalence in his literary criticism and his own style as well. Just as on a cruder level we can see sensibility warring against moral scruples in American criticism of Byron, including Emerson's, during the 1820's,[96] so in the later Emerson there is a conflict between his love of beauty itself and the demand of his conscience that this be subordinated to a spiritual purpose which he cannot always resolve by the assurance that "Beauty, in its largest and profoundest sense, is one expression for the universe" (CW, I, 24). At times he can say that though all vocations are ways to the truth, "in this instance of poetry the provocation is not that the Law is there, but the means are alluring" (J, VI, 144); but again, we find him telling Carlyle, "It is a poor second thought, this literary activity," compared to "the splendors of the Intellectual Law" (E-C, 358). Emerson's remarks about the writing process and the nature of style, which will be discussed in the next two chapters, fall on both sides of this issue. Yet fundamentally, like Channing before him, he considered the causes of art and religion inseparable, and if this accounts for his shortcomings as a writer and theorist, it is also the key to his power.

CHAPTER II

INSPIRATION *vs*. CRAFTSMANSHIP

Inspiration remains throughout his lifetime Emerson's way of accounting for the power that makes the highest artistic creation possible.[1] "I believe that nothing [great and lasting] can be done except by inspiration," he writes in 1851 and repeats in his old age (*J*, VIII, 223; *CW*, VIII, 271). But what exactly does he mean? "Inspiration" at once suggests pictures of sybils on tripods, an image which Emerson himself comes to encourage. But the core of his idea needs to be disentangled from the mystique he later builds around it.

Especially in his later work, Emerson likes to express the idea of inspiration dramatically. "All writing comes by the grace of God" is one of his characteristic ways of putting it (*CW*, III, 69); in the true composition, "God writes every word" (*J*, V, 445). Or he sometimes says that Reason, Spirit, the Universal Mind, or Nature writes the work. Because he considers the matter of divine influence to be of preeminent importance, when he theorizes about the aesthetic process, he often makes extreme-sounding statements which oversimplify it by picturing the artist as merely a tool in the hands of God. At such times Emerson, like Jones Very, appears to regard poems as the dictation of the Holy Ghost, valued by the writer not because they are his but because they are not (*J*, VI, 51). "The muse may be defined," he writes in "Instinct and Inspiration," as "*Supervoluntary ends effected by supervoluntary* means. No practical rules for the poem, no working-plan was ever drawn up. It is miraculous at all points. The poetic state given, a little more or less performance seems indifferent" (CW, XII, 71-72). The Dial essay on "Art," to take another example, asserts that the artist's contribution "is the least part of his work of art" (CW, VII, 43). After his dependence upon his materials, imitation, convention and the adventitious are discounted, there is scarcely anything in the finished work the artist can call his own (CW, VII, 43-46). At times, Emerson even warns that the artist must not interfere in the creative act. "A work of art is something which the Reason created in spite of the hands" (JMN, V, 206). It lasts "in proportion as it was not polluted by the wilfulness of the writer, but flowed from his mind after the divine order of cause and effect" (CW, XII, 466). These assertions sound like the claim made by some of Luther's successors, that good works are actually an obstacle to salvation.

Emerson's generalizations, however, do not seem so eccentric if read according to the spirit in which they are made. The idea that God is in man allows him to describe the creative process from either a human or a divine point of view. Art is either involuntary or voluntary, depending on how you look at it. "Relatively to the doer, it is instinct; relatively to the First Cause, it is Art," as Emerson says to resolve a knotty paragraph in "Art" which seems to be defining art as both conscious and unconscious at the same time (CW, VII, 39).

To take another example of this Emersonian strategy, in his journal for 1835, Emerson commends Bacon's defense of "written or premeditated preaching, of the written book, of the composed poem. No human wit unaided is equal to the production at one time of such a result as the Hamlet or Lear, but by a multitude of trials & a thousand rejections & the using & perusing of what was already written, one of those tragedies is at last completed" (JMN, V, 39). At the end of his second lecture on Shakespeare in a course on English literature given that winter, Emerson goes out of his way to make this point, attacking the notion that Shakespeare's plays could have been "thrown off at a heat" (EL, I, 319) and affirming that the composition of them must have cost him great pains (EL, I, 318-319). However, in an 1837 lecture on "Literature," Emerson revises his earlier opinion. Here he begins by remarking that Hamlet and other literary masterpieces could not be improvisations, but he goes on to argue that, strange as it might seem, they are still inspired writings. The "Mechanics of literature," he grants, seem "somewhat to modify [the] direct dependence of the author upon the absolute Reason" (EL, II, 63), but actually the interruptions in the long process of composition do not diminish his inspiration, but "only divide his work, as it were, into many several poems, as a life is divided into days" (EL, II, 64).

This example shows that Emerson could and did regard the same set of facts about the aesthetic process from either a practical or a transcendental point of view, according to his purposes. In 1835 his subject was Shakespeare's craftsmanship; in 1837 it was the operation of the universal mind in various fields of activity. When Emerson cried up inspiration in the later lecture to make a metaphysical point he was not necessarily changing his opinion about the method of artistic creation. However, it is true that the shift in emphasis is also indicative of the direction in which Emerson's thought was moving. By the time of "Works and Days," Emerson was using the same example to claim that "the works of genius cost nothing. There is no painful effort, but it is the spontaneous flowing of the thought. Shakespeare made his Hamlet as a bird weaves its nest" (CW, VII, 182). During the 1830's and early 1840's his notion of the aesthetic process became progressively more mystical and deterministic, as we shall see.

i

"Inspiration" in Emerson's first discussions does not imply an extraordinary state of mind; it is just a higher motive for art and indeed every other human activity. For instance, in Emerson's first public expression of the idea, the sermon on "The Holy Spirit" (S, 110; March, 1831), he says that the term means "nothing more than the uniform and universal operations of God upon men" (S, 110.6). Commenting on the inspiration of the scriptures, he exclaims,

> I believe when a man wholly opens his heart to the love of God & has no self-love, no motive but from on high, that a man speaks with authority, & not as the Scribes; he becomes passive to the influence of God, & speaks his words.

Jesus was such a man, as were the prophets and apostles in a lower degree, "and such have been all good men, and all men in different degrees."

> And whenever a man in the simplicity of his heart endeavoring to do his duty utters his honest conviction I suppose that man speaks by the same spirit which filled Paul, & his words are made effectual by the same holy confidence in the right which Jesus intended when he declared to his disciples that when they were bro't before kings & magistrates

> it shd. be given in the same hour what they
> should say.
>
> (S, 110. 13v)

These passages dignify as inspiration all utterance spoken sincerely with deep conviction. In this respect, there is no difference between Emerson's view and the moderate Unitarian view expressed by John Brazer in a series of articles for The Christian Examiner which also hold that divine influence is not distinguishable from the ordinary operations of the mind.[2]

For Emerson the chief early models of inspired eloquence are Jesus and Milton. He analyzes the secret of Christ's success in a very interesting sermon, "The Authority of Jesus," written in 1830 and revised in 1832.[3] Jesus, Emerson observes, was not learned, polemic, or artful; yet he spoke with unparallelled authority because he taught truth of the highest kind--moral truth--"with greater fidelity and distinctness than any other" (YES, 91). Moreover, it was "living truth," a part of himself and not repeated second hand (YES, 93). This truth was not monopolized by Jesus, Emerson continues; his successors can command a similar authority, or, he added in 1832, even surpass him, to the extent that they too can lead and teach the truth (YES, 97).

Milton was the literary genius whom Emerson found easiest to eulogize. In an 1834 lecture, he affirmed that although "as a poet, Shakespeare undoubtedly transcends," Milton stands "foremost of all men in literary history . . . in the power to inspire" (CW, XII, 253),[4] because of the way he has raised "The idea of Man in the minds of his contemporaries and of posterity" (CW, XII, 254). What accounts for Milton's power? He was a great stylist, to be sure, but "he knew that this mastery of language was a secondary power, and he respected the mysterious source whence it had its spring; namely, clear conceptions and a devoted heart" (CW, XII, 261). Unlike many men of genius, "his gifts are subordinated to his moral sentiments." In support Emerson quotes Milton's assertion that "'true eloquence I find to be none but the serious and hearty love of truth'" (CW, XII, 262).

This moral sincerity stressed by Milton and represented best by Jesus remains for Emerson the first prerequisite of true writing. In "The Poet" Emerson is at some pains to emphasize that genuine inspiration comes only "to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body," not by means of artificial stimulants (CW, III, 28). He believes also that moral sincerity can be detected in the finished work. During the early 1830's he sometimes uses the term "moral sublime" to signify this quality or the emotion produced by it.[5] But a more characteristic term for Emerson is "tone," as his commentators have noted.[6] "I know the Spirit," he writes in 1842," by its victorious tone" (J, VI, 309). In "The Authority of Jesus," Emerson emphasizes that the mastery of moral truth "shows itself in the tone that is taken by its teacher as much as in the facts that are presented. A tone of authority cannot be taken without truths of authority. It is impossible to mimick it. It proceeds directly from the perception of great principles. It is powerful directly because truth always convinces . . . . He that hath it in himself will move you. He will speak with authority. He that hath it not will labor with his rhetoric and his learning in vain." (YES, 95). In "The Over-Soul," to take another example, Emerson again finds tone the touchstone for distinguishing between "teachers sacred or literary," such as Herbert and

Pope. The "one class speak _from within_, or from experience, as parties and possessors of the fact; and the other class _from without_, as spectators merely . . ." (_CW_, II, 287).

But though moral sincerity is necessary to true writing, it does not supply the message or the language itself. The origin of these is mysterious and cannot be controlled. Emerson records Jesus' assurance to his disciples that "it shall be given thee in that hour what to say" (_JMN_, IV, 428) in his 1832-1833 notebook on composition, the general burden of whose entries is that writing comes spontaneously rather than by attention to rule. "According to the elevation of the soul will the power over language always be," as Emerson puts it in another entry (_JMN_, III, 284). When deductions are made for Emerson's assumptions about the artist's need for "clear conceptions and a devoted heart," spontaneity is really the main feature of his idea of the creative process.

That spontaneity will be a factor in any writer's consideration of this process is self-evident, unless we are to believe Edgar Allan Poe. Even Emerson's most extreme statements about inspiration are based on an experience which most writers share: we have hot and cold moments. The "inspiration makes a facility whilst it lasts in overcoming all the technical difficulties of rhythm & metre, which, I doubt not, surprises the poet in another hour, as much as it does the reader. He could not do it in cold blood."[7] But to Emerson's own practice as a diarist, spontaneity must have been especially important. Moreover, his poems, Carl Strauch notes, usually do seem to have come to him all at once, in that while he did make revisions, he rarely altered his original design.[8] One of a longish journal section of poetical fragments from 1827 suggests what may have been his method:

> When thy soul
> Is filled with a just image fear not thou
> Lest halting rhymes or unharmonious verse
> Cripple the fair Conception Leave the heart
> Alone to find its language. In all tongues
> It hath a sovereign instinct that doth teach
> An eloquence which rules can never give.
> In the high hour when Destiny ordains
> That thou hear testimony to its dooms
> That hour a guiding spirit shall impart
> The fervid utterance art could never find
> Wait then, stern friend, wait in majestic peace.
> (*JMN*, III, 85-86)

Except for its composure, this stanza's picture of the poet waiting for his muse is a good epitome of an attitude that recurs throughout Emerson's career. His comments at such times often show keen frustration. "I have often found cause to complain," he wrote in 1823, "that my thoughts have an ebb & flow. Whether any laws fix them & what the laws are I cannot ascertain . . . . The worst is, that the ebb is certain, long & frequent, while the flow comes transiently & seldom" (*JMN*, II, 153). His intellectual coming-of-age if anything increased the sense of frustration over his dull moments. "I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, *I am God* . . . ." reads a well-known entry of 1837; "Yet why not always so?" (*JMN*, V, 336-337). In his old age, he can still give no account of the comings and goings of inspiration, but only list some five "sources of inspiration"--health, solitary converse with nature, solitude of habit, conversation, and "factbooks"--which Cabot, it seems, extended to nine in the editing.[9] His hope and his frustrations are summed up in his favorite lines from Wordsworth:

> Tis the most difficult of tasks to keep
> Heights which the soul is competent to gain.
> (*The Excursion*, IV, 138-139)

Such is the sum of Emerson's own experience with inspiration: a mysterious ebb and flow, with accompanying sensations of blight and power. Unlike Wordsworth, he wrote no "Intimations" ode, but aging itself must also have contributed to an increasing sense of the artist's dependence upon inspired moments which his writings of the '30's and '40's reveal.

This change can best be shown in connection with Emerson's idea of genius. Genius is the term he most frequently uses to denote the artist's inspiration. When the soul "breathes through [the] intellect, it is genius," as Emerson puts it in "The Over-Soul" (CW, II, 271). The term is a staple of the critical vocabulary of romanticism. Before 1820 Edward Tyrell Channing, one of Emerson's Harvard teachers, was already using the term to defend freedom of self-expression in art.[10] But Emerson extends the term--like Sampson Reed in his "Oration on Genius," which Emerson much admired--by identifying it flatly with God's power.[11] Genius, "is, as it were, the voice of the Soul, of the Soul that made all men, uttered through a particular man."[12] From this follows the conclusion Emerson drew as early as 1831: genius is representative, "It is a larger imbibing of the common heart" (CW, II, 288), and "as soon as it is apprehended it is accepted by every man as a voice proceeding from his own inmost self." Granting this source, it follows too that "the analogy is always perfect between Virtue & genius. One is ethical the other intellectual creation" (JMN, V, 341).

In its operation, "the essence of Genius is Spontaneity," Emerson asserts in his 1839 lecture on "Genius."[13] In earlier lectures, however, he evinces a distrust of the possible excesses of spontaneity which he later abandons. An example is the first of Emerson's 1835 lectures on Shakespeare, which is devoted to an analysis of his genius. Here Emerson distinguishes three qualities to explain Shakespeare's "transcendent superiority as a writer:" "the Imaginative, the Reflective, and the Practical." The imaginative power is the gift of the poet. It is spontaneous and works best when "a man is inflamed with passion" (*EL*, I, 291). However, Emerson emphasizes, this faculty is not enough; "in many men of fine powers the imagination has been morbid from its own excess."[14] The poet needs a counterbalance, "a state of repose, an integrity to the mind, in which all objects are thrown back to stand in their due proportion" (*EL*, I, 296). This state of mind is reason, or reflection.[15] Emerson grants that reflection is "of all faculties esteemed the most fatal to the triumphs of the poetic art, because it seems necessary that the poet should believe his own fable," but declares that it is this "self-recovering, self collecting force" which makes Shakespeare universal (*EL*, I, 297). Emerson then goes on to say that the writer needs also a practical faculty or healthy understanding in order to communicate his insights to men (*EL*, I, 300-302).

In *Nature*, the distinction between spontaneity and reflectiveness lingers in Emerson's separate citation of the poet and the philosopher as examples of idealism (*CW*, I, 52-56), though he affirms that they are at bottom one (*CW*, I, 55). Here however the "heroic passion" of the poet is stressed without being undercut (*CW*, I, 52-53); and in the 1837 lecture on "Literature," the distinction is fully resolved. The faculty of imagination is not named, and yet it is spontaneity, not reflectiveness, which Emerson is emphasizing when he asserts, as we have seen, the absolute dependence of the writer upon Reason (EL, II, 63-65). As is shown by another lecture in the series, the pessimistic "The Present Age," Emerson is now more troubled by the threat which reflectiveness poses to original creation. "It is alleged," he says

> that the habit of the cultivated intellect of the present day is reflection, not instinct. Ours is distinguished from the Greek and Roman and Gothic ages and all the periods of childhood and youth by being the age of the second thought. The golden age is gone and the silver is gone--the blessed eras of unconscious life, of intuition, of genius.
>
> (EL, II, 168)[16]

> The poet, the teacher, no longer casts himself upon his genius, and is hurried into giddy heights he knows not how or whither, but like poor Schiller complains that he can no longer write poetry, for his critical judgment is too sharp for his imagination. The muse is checked and cowed by the watch that is kept on her.
>
> (EL, II, 168-169)

To be sure, this gloomy view is only one half of a deliberate antithesis Emerson is making in the last two lectures of the course. He immediately goes on to explain the compensating, the surpassing benefits of the age of Reflection, and maintains the affirmative tone through the closing lecture on "The Individual." But Emerson continues here and afterwards to caution that reflection can sink into a Hamlet-like despondency (EL, II, 180; CW, I, 109), or a "vicious subjectiveness" (CW, XII, 314), endangering true art. Besides, what makes Emerson take heart and change his gloomy tone in "The Present Age" is a limitation he sees to the "morbid consciousness" of excessive reflection: "for truly considered every man is the prisoner of ideas and must be unconscious." We are absolute dependence of the writer upon Reason (EL, II, 63-65). As is shown by another lecture in the series, the pessimistic "The Present Age," Emerson is now more troubled by the threat which reflectiveness poses to original creation. "It is alleged," he says

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Emerson turns, then, from proposing reflection as a check to imagination to celebrating unconsciousness as a check to reflection. This leads him to lay greater emphasis on spontaneity in the aesthetic process. In his 1839 lecture "Genius," he says that the creative power "is not a knack . . . nor any empirical skill whatsoever; it is not anything the man can handle and describe and communicate, can even do or not do, but always a power which overawes himself, always an enthusiasm not subject to his control, which takes him off his feet, draws him this way and that, and is the master, not the slave."[17] The suggestion of the poet's divine madness is repeated later the same year in a lecture on "Literature," which becomes "Thoughts on Modern Literature" (CW, XII, 467), in "The Method of Nature" (CW, I, 213, *passim*), and in the lecture on "The Poet" (1841), and finally given fullest expression in the 1844 essay, "The Poet." All in all, the notion of the artist passively submitting to an "enthusiasm not subject to his control" remains central to Emerson's notion of the creative process from 1839 on. That November, incidentally, is written Emerson's most famous version of the idea, "The Problem." Appropriately, the couplet,

> The passive Master lent his hand
> To the vast soul that o'er him planned,
> (CW, IX, 8)

was inscribed on his own gravestone.

Vivian Hopkins and other commentators have stressed the influence of neoplatonic thought on the development of Emerson's theory of inspiration, not only in the general idea of the poet's divine madness but, more specifically, according to Hopkins, in his use of the Plotinian theory of "the flowing"--the movement of the soul through the whole circuit of natural forms during the moment of inspired vision. This latter idea is used in "The Poet," where Emerson describes "the condition of true naming" as an abandonment "to the nature of things," a surrendering "to the divine _aura_ which breathes through forms, and accompanying that" (_CW_, III, 26).[18] The poem "Bacchus" and parts of "Poetry and Imagination" and the essay on "Swedenborg" (_CW_, IV, 96-97) also dilate on the idea of the poet's intoxicated empathy with the world-soul. F. I. Carpenter notes that "The Problem" makes use of three concepts from Plotinus important to Emerson's theory of art: inspiration, and also the theories of the pre-existence of form in the mind of the artist and the equality of art to nature.[19]

Without doubt it is significant that Emerson's renewed reading in Plotinus, which began about 1837, and the years of his intensest interest in the neoplatonists, 1841-1843, coincided with the change of emphasis in his idea of inspiration. However, the importance of this influence, I think, can be exaggerated. Emerson himself said that he read Proclus, whom one critic has called the model for his idea of the poet, "chiefly for rhetoric" (_J_, VI, 518; _v_. _CW_, III, 233).[20] In fact, his later celebration of the ecstasy of the creative process is of a piece with the movement of his thought as a whole. Studies of Emerson's development, in particular Stephen Whicher's _Freedom and Fate_, have shown that during the late '30's and early '40's, as he became more aware that man's divine nature is circumscribed by human limits, Emerson "moved from a subjective toward an objective idealism," from a view of man as ruler of the universe by right of the soul within him to a more fatalistic view of man as a part of the universe, the highest embodiment of the world-soul.[21] His growing disenchantment with reformism and his retreat from the ministry to a more contemplative life are both part of this change. Whicher also explains Emerson's late but enthusiastic celebration of the poet's vocation in the essays as the result of his resignation: "It is only because the poetic _life_ is not realized, perhaps cannot be, that the poet's prophecy of such a life can make him a liberating god."[22] Similarly, we can look at Emerson's emphasis on the passivity of creation as still another sign of his transfer of hope from the individual to the universe. Because the muse cannot be domesticated, the poet must submit to her. As he wrote in 1845, "The aim of writers is to tame the Holy Ghost, and produce it as a show to the city. But the sole terms on which the Infinite will come to cities is the surrender of cities to its will" (_J_, VII, 16).

The connection between the development of Emerson's aesthetic ideas and his philosophy as a whole can be seen in "The Method of Nature" (1841), where Plotinian rhetoric is used, but only as a means to make a new point about men's relation to the universe. This address has often been cited as transitional in Emerson's change from an emanationist to an evolutionist view of nature.[23] Whereas _Nature_ claimed that man's birthright entitles him to master nature and become himself a god, the main theme of "The Method of Nature" is that the method of both nature and man is "ecstasy:" that is, both exist for a universal end beyond themselves, towards which they are constantly being directed, but directed in ways incomprehensible, so that all appears to be in confusing flux.[24] Emerson argues that in view of this condition, the only proper attitude in life is worship, a steadfast piety toward the unknown end of being, in whatever field of inquiry or activity one undertakes. "The poet must be a rhapsodist; his inspiration a sort of bright casuality; his will in it only the surrender of will to the Universal Power, which will not be seen face to face, but must be received and sympathetically known" (CW, I, 213).

Emerson's comments in "The Method of Nature" suggest that his increasing emphasis on spontaneity in the creative process is best regarded as a piece of compensation. The less one can control inspiration or comprehend the universe, the more necessary it is for him to abandon himself to it. The journals of this period, incidentally, have an unusual number of comments showing frustration at not being able to write.[25] Also, between the lecture (1841) and the essay (1844) on "The Poet" there is quite a difference in the tone of the final portion. In the earlier version, probably the one Whitman heard, Emerson was supremely confident. "To doubt that the poet will yet appear is to doubt of day and night," he asserts.[26] In the essay, however, he admits regretfully, "I look in vain for the poet whom I describe . . . . Time and nature yields us many gifts, but not yet the timely man, the new religion, the reconciler, whom all things await" (CW, III, 37). Indeed, except in short flurries of excitement over Whitman and a few other writers, Emerson was never in his life to be persuaded that an American bard had come.

ii

Emerson's idea of the sequence of the creative process is described by Vivian Hopkins as a three-stage affair. She calls these stages "inspiration," "imagination," and "expression."[27] The poet waits, the divine afflatus comes (inspiration), he resigns himself to it and is elevated to a state of vision (imagination), and expression follows. This is a full but composite picture of Emerson's commentary in a number of different essays; he himself is more apt to discuss the process simply as reception plus expression. In "Intellect," for example, he says that the two gifts of genius are "the thought and the publication." The first is a spiritual experience which all men are able to feel; "but only in the artist does it descend into the hand" and find expression (CW, II, 334, 335). So in his portraits of the poet, Emerson emphasizes more the second gift of genius--expression--as the chief way in which he is representative. All men desire to express themselves and are incomplete because they cannot; the poet has this power and so can satisfy their desire by expressing men's thoughts for them.[28] Actually, the poet is representative on two counts, "in virtue of being the largest power to receive and to impart" (CW, III, 6), but to place more weight on the second, Emerson alters the epithet used in the original lecture, "Man knowing and man saying"--and calls the poet simply "the sayer" in the essay.[29]

Spontaneity, however, is the characteristic of both the thought and expression of genius. The first is "always a miracle, which no frequency of occurrence or incessant study can ever familiarize." As for the second, although "the power of picture or expression . . . implies a mixture of will, a certain control over the spontaneous states . . . . yet the imaginative vocabulary seems to be spontaneous also. It does not flow from experience, but from a richer source. Not by any conscious imitation of particular forms are the grand strokes of the painter executed, but by repairing to the fountain-head of all forms in his mind" (CW, II, 335, 336-337). It is significant that this account of the creative process, which is clearer than anything Emerson says in "The Poet," occurs in the essay on "Intellect." In fact Emerson's most basic formula for creativity, as the previous quotation shows, is simply alertness or activity of intellect. He realizes that there is a gap between thought and successful expression, but declares that the solution is in "a vigilance which brings the intellect in its greatness and best state to operate every moment (CW, II, 340). Through proper living habits on the one hand and skill and training on the other may be factors in the creative process, the definitive factor is always a surprise. "All good conversation, manners and action," Emerson says from "Experience," "come from a spontaneity which foregoes usages and makes the moment great. Nature hates calculators; her methods are saltatory and impulsive " (CW, III, 68).

This conception of art as inspiration, F. O. Matthiessen remarks in his chapter on Emerson in American Renaissance, "is in sharp opposition to that of art as craftsmanship."[30] Certainly the Achilles heel of Emerson's theory of the creative process seems to be the assumption that the inspiration will necessarily manage to express itself, and he comes more and more to fall back on this assumption, as the power to write seems to him more and more matter of fate. As he puts it in "Merlin I,"

> There are open hours
> When the God's will sallies free,
> And the dull idiot might see
> The flowing fortunes of a thousand years;--
> Sudden, at unawares,
> Self-moved, fly-to the doors,
> Nor sword of angels could reveal
> What they conceal.
> (_CW_, IX, 122)

In this view, mere talent or skill in "rhythm and number" (_CW_, IX, 121) is useless to the true poet; "the order of the intellectual world" is "to keep down talent in its place, to enthrone the instinct" (_CW_, XII, 58). Emerson drives home this point by endless reiterations of a distinction between genius and talent originally borrowed from Coleridge. It is also clear that Emerson values the inspiration itself more than any embodiment of it, and not for an æsthetic but for a moral end. "The poetic gift we want, as the health and supremacy of man,--not rhymes and sonneteering," he exclaims in "Poetry and Imagination," "The supreme value of poetry is to educate us to a height beyond itself, or which it rarely reaches;--the subduing mankind to order and virtue" (_CW_, VIII, 63-64, 65-66).

On the other hand, it is equally true that Emerson was sensitive to craftsmanship in art. "All the great masters finish their works to the eye and hand, as well as to the Divine Reason: to the shop as well as to the gods," he writes, thinking of the lapses in Bronson Alcott's style (_J_, VIII, 396). At the same time Emerson was beginning to utter his most extreme statements about the passive ecstasy of the creative process, his journals and especially his letters record his increasing dismay with writers in his circle who seemed to be taking the idea too seriously. When Ellery Channing refused to alter some verses he had submitted to the Dial, Emerson sent Elizabeth Hoar this gentle complaint:

> All my conjectural emendations of our wonderful Manuscript Poet came back to me dishonoured. Raphael [S. G. Ward] & Margaret combined against me. I think the poet has given them philtres that they (and I believe thou also, O faithful sister mine,) do face me down with his bad grammar & his nonsense as all consecrated by his true afflatus. Is the poetic inspiration amber to embalm & enhance flies & spiders? As it fell in the case of Jones Very, cannot the spirit parse & spell?
> (L, II, 331)

Ellery, Very, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, Henry Thoreau, and Charles King Newcomb all at one time or another drew criticism from Emerson for misdemeanors of style.[31] Emerson's twenty-year running commentary on Ellery, in particular, should dispel the impression given by his theories that he was indifferent to technique in literature.

Emerson had high hopes for Ellery, whose verses he discovered in 1839 through Samuel G. Ward (L, II, 227-228) and introduced to the public in a long article in the second number of the Dial. He considered him a born versifier. In an 1843 letter to John Sterling, an English friend and fellow clergyman-poet, Emerson called Ellery "the best poet we have" (L, III, 181). But this praise was always qualified by a disapproval of Ellery's slovenly craftsmanship. "He has a more poetic temperament than any other in America," Emerson summed it up in 1856, "but the artistic executive power of completing a design he has not. His poetry is like the artless warbling of a vireo, which whistles prettily all day . . . but never rounds a tune" (J, IX, 54).

In his first letter to Ellery, requesting permission to print his verses, he mixed his praise diplomatically:

> I have seen no verses written in America that have such inward music, or that seem to me such authentic inspiration. Certainly I prize finished verses, which yours are not . . . . Yet I prize at such a dear rate the poetic soul, that where that is present, I can easily forgive the license & negligence the absence of which makes the merit of mediocre verses; Nay, I do not know but I prefer the first draught and to be present at the secret of creation before the vamping & rhetoric are used . . .
> (L, II, 252-253)

After this, Emerson had some second thoughts; a few months later he wrote in his journal, "Channing's poetry and ---'s have a certain merit which unfits them for print," namely honest but crude inspiration (J, V, 417). So in his Dial review Emerson tactfully introduced Channing's poetry as "verses of the portfolio," arguing that since they were confessions not written for the public, their very roughness made them more appropriate, because more sincere, than polished verse. Of course, Emerson continued, unfinished verse should not be published promiscuously; but men of genius are generally less capable than others "of any perfect exhibition," because their desire to please the public is always secondary to their worship of ideal beauty. The more practical man of talent therefore has an advantage over the genius, "yet are the failures of genius better than the victories of talent; and we are sure that some crude manuscript poems have yielded us a more sustaining and a more stimulating diet, than many elaborated and classic productions" (Unc, 139, 140).

Emerson's argument is, I think, a fair statement of his own position, and perfectly defensible. Depth plus polish is better than depth alone, but the latter is better than mere facility. It could be argued that his protege had neither, but was simply a dilettante; Emerson entertained this thought himself, when he had begun to weary of Ellery's ceaseless improvisating (J, VI, 357-359). Perhaps Emerson was a bit too much taken by the fluency in Ellery which he lacked himself and never ceased to consider superior to his own poetic gift,[32] but the qualifications in his praise of this fluency show a discrimination of taste which the rhapsodizing in "The Poet" does not suggest.

If the case of Channing helps us gauge the degree of Emerson's objections to genius without craftsmanship, even more revealing is an instance in his criticism of the man of genius and the man of talent set at odds: Wordsworth and Tennyson. Despite basic and persistent objections to both, Emerson grew to admire them, and their writings provoke some of his more interesting criticism.

Wordsworth he did not really come to esteem until 1830 or so, though much earlier he had high praise for the "Intimations" ode. (J, II, 109). Soon afterwards, however, Emerson started to picture Wordsworth as a representative of "the human soul in these ages striving for a just publication of itself."[33] Not only had Wordsworth brought back to nature a poetry "which had become meretricious and secondary,"[34] but "almost alone in his generation" had he "treated the Mind well" (J, IX, 53). But though Emerson considered him "the great philosophical poet of the present day" (EL, I, 140), he was taken aback by Wordsworth's "feeble poetic talents."[35] He read him with a mixture of pleasure and chagrin. Picking up a new volume in 1835, Emerson reminds himself that he may find "dulness & flatness, but I shall not find meanness & error." But on the next day he writes, "What platitudes I find in Wordsworth. 'I poet bestow my verse on this & this & this.' Scarce has he dropped the smallest piece of an egg, when he fills the barnyard with his cackle." (_JMN_, V, 99, 100).[36] In fact, Emerson's praise of Wordsworth centers on a very few poems: the "Immortality" ode (the greatest), "Laodamia" (the second greatest), and "Dion" are the only ones to which he persistently recurs and when he does it is the conception and not the verse which he praises. The idea of the soul's preexistence in the "Ode;" the theme of "Laodamia," a kind of poetical sermon preached by a dead warrior admonishing his wife to remember him chastely and not carnally; and the moral tone of "Dion" all greatly appealed to Emerson and probably account for most of his admiration of these poems.[37] By 1840 Emerson had found the right epigram to embalm his balanced opinion of the poet, versions of which he used many times afterwards: "Wordsworth has done as much as any living man to restore sanity to cultivated society" (_J_, V, 393). In his old age, Emerson felt the desire to say something more about Wordsworth in order to "vindicate" his genius "and show his distinctive merits" (_J_, X, 275); this, I think, accounts for the relative length of the notice on Wordsworth in the preface to _Parnassus_; but there Emerson only repeats what he has said many times before, that "Wordsworth has the merit of just perception, but not that of deft poetic execution."[38]

Tennyson remains for some years in Emerson's estimation "a beautiful half of a poet" (_J_, V, 57). He is the journal original for the "recent writer of lyrics" described in "The Poet" as "a man of subtle mind, whose head appear(s) to be a music-box of delicate tunes and rhythms," but who is not yet a poet, "plainly a contemporary, not an eternal man" (CW, III, 9; J, VI, 286). Emerson's admiration of Tennyson was usually qualified in this way. And yet from his first evaluation of the poet in the journals it is clear that Emerson enjoyed reading him (JMN, V, 178). "I thought Tennyson as you do, a godsend," he wrote Margaret Fuller in 1842, "although . . ."--and the usual reservations follow (L, III, 74). Emerson's Dial review of Tennyson's poems is almost completely favorable. As we should expect, it praises them chiefly for "musical expression" and "picturesque representation." But Emerson also comments,

> So large a proportion of even the good poetry of our time is either over-ethical or over-passionate, and the stock poetry is so deeply tainted with a sentimental egotism, that this, whose chief merits lay in melody and picturesque power, was most refreshing. What a relief, after sermonizing and wailing had dulled the sense with such a weight of cold abstraction, to be soothed by this ivory lute!
>
> (Unc, 167-168)

However, the provocative "Ulysses" was Emerson's favorite Tennyson poem for some years,[39] while In Memoriam, on the other hand, was memorably characterized as "the commonplaces of condolence among good Unitarians in the first week of mourning" (J, VIII, 163); and Emerson's complaint that the poem never rose above the intellectual level of its audience was also his great criticism of Tennyson in English Traits: "He contents himself with describing the Englishman as he is, and proposes no better" (CW, V, 257).[40] But when Idylls of the King began appearing, Emerson excitedly hailed it:

> England is solvent . . . for here comes Tennyson's poem, indicating a supreme social culture, a perfect insight, and the possession of all the weapons and all the functions of a man, with the skill to wield them.
>
> (J, IX, 207)

Emerson had such high praise for the poem because he thought the subject at last worthy of Tennyson's ability. "The long promise" of English poets from Chaucer to the Jacobeans "to write the national poem of Arthur, Tennyson at last keeps, in these low self-despising times" (J, IX, 208). Though Emerson still downgrades Tennyson as a man of talent (J, X, 217) and a mere contemporary man,[41] his final comments on the poet are more enthusiastic than those of the forties. "The only limit to the praise of Tennyson as a lyric poet is, that he is alive. If he were an ancient, there would be none," is Emerson's last journal assessment (1871) (J, X, 242), though the phrase "as a lyric poet" may be meant as another limitation.

For Emerson, then, Wordsworth is genius and Tennyson talent; Wordsworth is the lonely seer and Tennyson the man of the times. "Tennyson's main purpose is the rendering, whilst Wordsworth's is just value of the dignity of the thought."[42] In the Pantheon, Wordsworth clearly comes higher than Tennyson. "How shall I find my heavenly bread in Tennyson? or in Milnes? in Lowell or in Longfellow?" Emerson asks in 1846. "Yet Wordsworth was mindful of the office." (J, VII, 164). In English Traits, Emerson claims that "the exceptional fact of the period is the genius of Wordsworth." Although "Tennyson is endowed precisely in points where Wordsworth wanted . . . . he wants a subject, and climbs no mount of vision to bring its secrets to the people" (CW, V, 257). Even after the notice of the Idylls, in the journals and lectures of the '60's the same contrast between the two poets, with the same preference for Wordsworth, is reaffirmed.[43]

But what Emerson most prized in both poets were the works which seemed to him to have both great design and great execution. In the absence of this combination he was quite able to play Wordsworth's genius off against Tennyson's talent. The first essay in which the two poets are contrasted, "Europe and European Books" (1843), (CW, XII, 365-372) is a good example of this balance, which one might not expect after reading about Emerson's theories of inspiration and genius. Emerson begins discussion of Wordsworth with a frank admission of the poet's defects, qualifying this at last by saying that at his best he "is really a master of the English language . . . ." Emerson then goes on stoutly to defend Wordsworth for his contribution to the sanity of his generation, in particular, his self-reliance in following his own poetic bent and thereby writing more truly. "But, notwithstanding all Wordsworth's grand merits," the review continues, it was a pleasure to read Tennyson's new poetry. "Perhaps we felt the popular objection that he wants rude truth;" it is true, he concedes, that Tennyson has more surface than bottom. "But let us not quarrel with our benefactors . . . . It is long since we have had as good lyrist; it will be long before we have his superior." By approaching each poet first with criticism, then with praise, and by contrasting them as complements, Emerson reaches a measured evaluation of both.

In this same review, Emerson expresses in a characteristic and striking image the ideal he has in mind for poetry, which links the opposite poles of Tennyson and Wordsworth:

> The poet, like the electric rod, must reach from a point nearer the sky than all surrounding objects, down to the earth, and into the dark wet soil, or neither is of use. The poet must not only converse with pure thought, but he must demonstrate it almost to the senses.
> (CW, XII, 366)

This image is later used in the preface to Parnassus, and variations of it appear throughout Emerson's criticism, from 1826 on,[44] indicating that his idea of genius is not really opposed to talent, but includes it. He considers inspiration, or in this image, converse with pure thought, as the source of strength and first condition of good writing, and so he places the greater emphasis on it, obscuring a genuine regard for executive skill by metaphysical simplifications like "all writing comes by the grace of God" and by such sophistries as ascribing even the details of the work to divine guidance. To be sure, he expects more of inspiration than it can in practice do, and can not understand why Wordsworth, for example, did not have Tennyson's talent--"asthma of the mind" is his final explanation.[45] He maintains the impossible dream of an utterance which would be spontaneous and powerful as a bolt of lightening. This notion he expresses most dramatically in the rhetoric of "The Poet," which is unfortunately his best-known statement about the creative process. But actually Emerson regards inspiration not just as wild effusion, though he thinks that this is better than its opposite, but as descending to all the details of the work; art, in one of his best definitions, is "the inspiration of a just design working through all the details" (J, IX, 528). In Emerson's mind the theory of inspiration is only opposed to that kind of craftsmanship which is carried out mechanically without the whole heart of the workman.

The ambivalent relation of craftsmanship to inspiration in Emerson's thought can perhaps be clarified through the analogy of manners, the art of behavior, which in fact he once defines in terms of language, as the soul's "last vehicle of articulate speech (CW, VI, 169). Emerson's interest in this apparently superficial topic surprises, in the same way that his attention to the details of composition does not seem to fit his emphasis on genius. But for Emerson, manners are the expression of character, just as a truly finished work of art is the test of perfect genius. His essays show considerable sensitivity to the grace and power of manners. "No man can resist their influence. There are certain manners which are learned in good society, of that force that if a person have them, he or she must be considered, and is everywhere welcome, though without beauty, or wealth, or genius" (CW, VI, 170). Emerson himself was possessed of an extraordinary gentlemanliness. Yet manners are of importance to him chiefly for the qualities which underlie them, such as power, self-reliance, and love. "'Tis hard to keep the what from breaking through this pretty painting of the how," he observes in "Behavior" (CW, VI, 187); by the conclusion of "Manners" he is impatient:

> we have lingered long enough in these painted courts. The worth of the thing signified must vindicate our taste for the emblem. Everything that is called fashion and courtesy humbles itself before the cause and fountain of honor, creator

> of titles and dignities, namely the heart
> of love.
> (CW, III, 153).

Therefore Emerson is liable to generalize, "A sainted soul is always elegant" (CW, III, 131), or, "We love any forms, however ugly, from which great qualities shine" (CW, VI, 300). Yet the topic of manners continues to draw him by its partial connection and partial discrepancy with character. He sees an identity of the two in the type of the gentleman, though he recognizes the perversion of this ideal in the love of fashion, or manners institutionalized (CW, III, 122ff). In a revealing sentence from "Manners," he declares, "I will neither be driven from some allowance to Fashion as a symbolic institution, nor from the belief that love is the basis of courtesy" (CW, III, 142-143).

So, in his literary thought, Emerson emphasizes that "Power is the first good . . . . A rush of thought is the only conceivable prosperity that can come to us" (CW, VIII, 272). He believes "the thought is prior to the form" in composition (CW, III, 10) and the final purpose of the work is to inspire, and so he has no use for the form by itself, any more than for mere foppery. Yet as his criticism of Wordsworth and Channing shows, he realizes that "the most wonderful inspirations die with their subject" if the artist "has no hand to paint them to the senses" (CW, II, 335). The fact that Emerson theorizes as much as he does about language and rhetoric also shows that his interest in art is more than spiritual. Indeed, more than most thinkers, he has a vital interest in the embodiment as well as the spirit of the work, because of the very nature of the ideas he is trying to express. The main reason for this, namely his conception of the relation between nature and the soul, and the conclusions about literary style to which this theory helps him, will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF EMBODIMENT

Correspondence is Emerson's way of accounting for the relation between man and the external universe. His version of the idea is essentially that since mind and matter are both creations of spirit their laws are parallel and intertranslateable and nature is the mirror of the mind.[1]

Because of this correspondence, Nature becomes the measure of man's attainments. As Emerson puts it in "The American Scholar," "so much of nature as he is ignorant of, so much of his own mind does he not yet possess." "Know thyself" and "study nature" mean the same thing (CW, I, 87). A command of nature is therefore the practical test of genius. For the writer, this means being able to find in nature the form to express his thought. "Genius certifies its entire possession of its thought, by translating it into a fact which perfectly represents it" (CW, VIII, 22). By "nature" in the widest sense Emerson means the whole external universe or "not-me." He often declared that "there is no subject that does not belong to the Poet" (J, VIII, 389). Joining the revolt against neoclassical conventions, he pointedly embraced the common and sat at the feet of the familiar (CW, I, 111), and said that the test of "poetic genius is the power to read the poetry of affairs" (CW, VIII, 34). In the essay "History" the past is also considered as a correlative of the mind and thus a part of nature. But usually "nature" in Emerson's vocabulary means mother nature, and his poet's habitat is the countryside.

Just as inspiration is the heart of Emerson's notion of the creative process, so the idea of correspondence informs his notion of literary style. It stimulates Emerson to integrate his theory of rhetoric with his theory of nature to a degree that is, I think, unique among the writers of the romantic movement who share his belief in the reciprocity of nature and the mind. Not only does he campaign like Wordsworth for a diction based on nature, he also interprets such stylistic concepts as rhyme, image, metaphor, analogy, composition, and structure in light of the method of nature. Most of these concepts will be discussed below, but the case of rhyme may be mentioned here as an illustration. Occasionally Emerson calls attention to a correspondence between rhyme in art and rhyme in nature. The reflection of landscape in water, he says in "Poetry and Imagination,"

> is rhyme to the eye, and explains the charm of rhyme to the ear. Shadows please us as still finer rhymes. Architecture gives us the like pleasure by the repetition of equal parts in a colonnade, in a row of windows, or in wings . . .
> (CW, VIII, 45)

The rhyme of poetry too is based on nature. "Metre begins with pulse-beat"(CW, VIII, 46). Couplets, according to the argument of "Merlin II," are the law of nature, for everything is polar: "Balance-loving Nature / Made all things in pairs" (CW, IX, 123). By means of such comparisons Emerson interprets poetry and nature in terms of each other. On the one hand, poetry is judged according to nature. As Emerson says in "The Poet," "A rhyme in one of our sonnets should not be less pleasing than the iterated notes of a seashell, or the resembling difference of a group of flowers" (CW, III, 25). On the other hand, nature can be comprehended poetically in terms of rhyme. "Astronomy, Botany, Chemistry, Hydraulics and the elemental forces have their own periods and returns" (CW, VIII, 49). As a result, the rhymes of poetry are seen to have a certain truth and authority beyond the pleasure of their music, to the extent that they approach nature, and Emerson can say, "The rhyme of the poet / Modulates the king's affairs" (CW, IX, 123).

In the example of rhyme, what excites Emerson is the general sense of reciprocity between poetry and nature rather than any precise deductions about prosody or natural science. This is true of the idea of correspondence itself in his thought as a whole. The idea is not so much argued as assumed, not so much demonstrated as celebrated. Its importance for Emerson is as a general principle and not as a system; particular applications were interesting to him for their metaphorical truth, not for their literal truth or falsehood. For instance, to Emerson the most significant exponent of the doctrine of correspondence was Swedenborg; he "of all men in the recent ages, stands eminently for the translator of nature into thought" (CW, III, 35). Yet in lectures and essays Emerson most frequently treated him as the father of modern poetic, thereby annoying the Swedenborgians, who did not like their prophet's teaching regarded as mere poetry.[2] On the other hand, the basic idea that there is a relation between nature and thought was of paramount importance to Emerson. Swedenborg was important to him as a poet because he was also a seer.

It is fair to say, then, that for Emerson correspondence was a poetic philosophy: true, yet, true only if expressed poetically. Such was the way Emerson regarded all philosophical propositions. This may be illustrated by "The Sphinx" (CW, IX, 20-24), a work of special authority since Emerson placed it at the head of his collected poems. The sphinx was for him, as for Carlyle, a favorite symbol of the "open secret" of nature.[3] The poem itself has been a riddle to many readers, since it is at first hard to see why the sphinx evades the poet after he has repeated "correct" Emersonian doctrine to her. The point is, I think, that nature tests man's affirmations by requiring him to find them in her. She is his "eye-beam". (Moreover, while it is true that "'Who telleth one of my meanings / Is master of all I am'" (CW, IX, 25), it is also true that to read even one fact requires a perfect perception of the whole.)[4] The poem itself, however, can be said to fulfill the sphinx's requirements by grasping and embodying the man-nature relation in the form of a parable, rather than by making a bare assertion as does the poet therein; this may help account for the merriness of the ending. Testimony to the truth of Emerson's idea is given by Henry Thoreau, who wrote out a sixteen-page interpretation of the poem, trying to reduce it to a logical argument in the same way that the poet tries to answer the sphinx. Thoreau concludes, "I now see the great advantage of verse over prose--and how all comentaries must be finite, but a text is infinite."[5]

On the whole, Emerson's poetic has the weight of a philosophy behind it. Nature is the measure of a man's thought; literary style is based on the method of nature; and so mastery of it has philosophic as well as aesthetic significance. The theory itself is therefore something more and less than a theory of style; it is controlled by Emerson's larger interest inthe relation of mind to nature and so is only halfway limited to art, but at the same time it dignifies art as the legitimate vehicle for expressing the relation. "The Sphinx," masterful in conception yet woeful in metrics, is the kind of bastard this alliance often produces. Yet Emerson's notion of style still deserves to be studied more seriously than it has been. In fact, Emerson's idea of correspondence adapts his metaphysics of nature to his literary program with a surprising degree of success, as we shall see below.

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The importance of correspondence to Emerson's literary ideas, like the theory of inspiration, can be predicted from the earliest journals. When we look at a summer morning's landscape, he wrote in 1820, "we feel . . . that eternal analogy which subsists between the external changes of nature & scenes of good & ill that chequer human life" (JMN,I, 19). The poetic impulse "seems to consist in the pleasure of finding out a connection between a material image and a moral sentiment" (JMN, I, 63-64), he recorded in 1822.

This sentence reads like a paraphrase of Francis Jeffrey's defination of poetry in the Edinburgh Review, which Emerson copied into his "Encyclopedia:" "Poetry . . . consists in the fine perception & vivid expression of that subtle & mysterious analogy which exists between the physical & the moral world . . ."[6] That versions of the idea of correspondence came from such a source suggests rightly that Emerson's own development of it cannot be traced to any one origin. Sherman Paul shows convincingly, I think, that although Emerson eventually gave credit to Swedenborg as the teacher of correspondence to the age, "it can scarcely be claimed that Swedenborg was the single or even catalytic influence in Emerson's use of correspondence."[7] According to Paul, Coleridge was the catalyst for Emerson, with numerous other figures including the Swedenborgians Sampson Reed, Oegger, and J.J.G. Wilkinson and their master himself in subordinate roles.[8]

In any case, the development of Emerson's thought on the subject was made possible only by the idea of divine immanence. The limitation of his early view is shown by his remarks about nature in the sermon "Summer" (1829), where he simply echoes the traditional Christian idea that nature has been providentially arranged by God for our use and religious instruction: "all nature is a book on which one lesson is written . . . . This lesson is the omnipresence of God" (YES, 40). In a way he is close here to his later position; there is a passage in "Summer" where Emerson unmistakably divides the uses of nature into commodity, beauty, language, and discipline (YES, 43-45), with the same order and emphasis as in Nature.[9] It is not so much Emerson's view of nature as his view of man's relation to nature which changes. The conclusion of "Summer" is simply that we should obey God's will in as orderly a way as the natural creation does; in Nature, where God is located within man, the conclusion is that man becomes God by mastering nature.[10] In this view, the perception of man's relation to nature is not merely a discovery which redounds to the glory of God, substantiating revealed religion, but is the very life of the soul. "'Every object rightly seen unlocks a new faculty of the soul' . . . . a new weapon in the magazine of power" (CW, I, 35). Moreover, if man is divine, he can use these perceptions to build a world of his own commensurate to nature.

The first journal indications of Emerson's mature view on correspondence begin appearing, as we might expect, in the spring of 1831 (JMN, III, 256).[11] The first sermon, in my opinion, to show significant influence, was preached that September (S, 127).[12] A journal entry from April, 1832, resolves to "write a sermon upon Animals. They are to man in life what fables about them are in Ethics. Draw the moral then of the bee, ant, fox, hedgehog, ermine, swine, roe, woodpecker, pigeon, worm, moth, mite" (JMN, IV, 9). This is done in passing in the sermon "Thinking Well of Human Nature" (May, 1832), where Emerson asserts "it is that which alone resides in man, it is moral nature, which affords the key by which the works of nature are to be read" (S, 155.8). Man, "the image of God in the lower world" (S, 155.7), is thus capable of being ruler of the external universe. About 1830 Emerson begins to show an intensified interest in natural science;[13] as he said later, he hoped to learn the language of nature so he could read "the great book which is written in that tongue" (JMN, IV, 95). Sermons such as "Astronomy" (May, 1832) show this interest. Here, however, Emerson's purpose is simply to show that Copernican astronomy "proves theism but disproves dogmatic theology" (JMN, IV, 26; YES, 174-176); God is still depicted in the old rhetoric as "an intelligent cause" (YES, 175). It is not until Emerson's return from Europe, when--doubtless partly as a result of his memorable visit to the Jardin des Plants, where he saw skeletons of animals laid out in a scale-of-being order--[14]his mature idea of correspondence begins really to emerge, in the last section of his lecture on "The Uses of Natural History" (November, 1833).

This section is a first version of the "Language" chapter in *Nature* (*CW*, I, 25-35). Supported by quotations from Swedenborg and Coleridge, Emerson argues, here as in 1836, that nature is a language in a double sense--it provides us with our vocabulary and it images moral truth--"because the whole of Nature is a metaphor or image of the human Mind." Emerson proposes to his hearers that, next to the miracle of being itself, "the most mysterious and wonderful fact . . . with which we are acquainted [is] the power of *expression* which belongs to external nature; or, that correspondence of the outer world to the inward world of thought and emotions, by which it is suited to represent what we think (*EL*, I, 24).

Emerson's sense of reciprocity between nature and the mind, he quickly realized, gave a special meaning to his old notion of poetry showing analogies between the natural and moral worlds. Reflecting in 1832 on Zoroastrianism and Swedenborgianism, Emerson saw in them "the element of poetry according to Jeffrey's true theory--the effect produced by making everything outward only a sign of something inward" (*JMN*, IV, 11). But whereas Jeffrey had insisted that literary expression should use only such analogies as conformed to universal standards of taste,[15] Emerson could now assume tacitly that the mind by right of Reason is justified in making its own analogies independently of exterior standards.

This assumption constitutes the chief virtue and the chief vice of Emerson's literary theory. On the positive side, it liberates the imagination. On the negative, it too readily takes it for granted that the spirit will guide the imagination to the right images to embody thought. In the abstract, the assumption is plausible and exciting; in actuality it does not account for the possibility of the creative mind running wild. Of Emerson's theory, the strong and weak points of his own style supply the best critique. Within its limits, however, Emerson's theory deserves a more sympathetic discussion than it has yet received, as can be seen through analysis of his conceptions of language, imagination, composition, and structure.

ii

According to Nature, "Language" is one of the four basic categories into which the uses contributing to "the final cause of the world" all "admit of being thrown," as Emerson casually puts it (CW, I, 12). The argument of the chapter is that language expresses spirit, because words are derived from and therefore signalize things in nature, while these in turn symbolize spiritual facts, and nature as a whole symbolizes spirit. As in "The Uses of Natural History," this logic depends upon a double meaning of the word "language:" first, in its usual sense of "words" and then in its metaphorical sense of "symbol." As with the case of rhyme, rhetoric and nature are made to interpret each other.

As a linguistic argument, the chapter is a pleasant and mostly unoriginal piece of fantasy. The studies of Old Testament poetry by Lowth and Herder, both translated into English about 1830, had seemed to substantiate by the example of the Hebrews the romantic notion that language is derived from nature and so in its infancy speech is metaphorical. There were a number of articles on the subject in New England literary periodicals, among them one by Emerson's ex-pupil and friend Elizabeth Peabody, who used Herder as a text in her teaching, which Emerson followed with interest. He himself had probably known about the theory since college.[16] The Swedenborgians, especially Oegger (to whom Peabody probably introduced him), fortified Emerson's first point and supplied the second, "Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts."[17] His real interest is in the third proposition, "Nature is the symbol of spirit " (CW, I, 25), which, as usual, is not demonstrated but jumped to, after some preliminary examples.

"Language," however, is doubtless the chapter on rhetoric which Emerson had been planning as early as April, 1834 (JMN, IV, 273), and can be taken as the key to his thoughts about literary language.[18] As a literary program, "Language" amounts to an advocacy of concrete diction and symbolic images. Language is now debased, Emerson says, by the divorce of words from the things which they signify, "but wise men pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things." Wise, because concrete diction is not merely sound rhetoric, but also "a commanding certificate that he who employs it is a man in alliance with truth and God" (CW, I, 30), because of the connection, through nature, between language and spirit. "Good writing and brilliant discourse are perpetual allegories," because there is a material image which will express every thought. From his own experience Emerson could say that "this imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind," and could recommend country life as a stimulus for such expression (CW, I, 31).[19]

In Nature these ideas are not advanced primarily as a literary program. This is done, however, in the introductory lecture to Emerson's course on English Literature given the previous winter. This lecture, together with the first one on Shakespeare in that same course, contains most of the material for "Language".[20] Literature, Emerson says in the opening lecture, is the result of man's irresistible impulse to express his ideas, which finds outlets in many ways but most perfectly in language (*EL*, I, 219). He then devotes the next five pages to explaining the same three-point notion of language presented in *Nature*, concluding that the purpose of literature, "so far as it is pictures of thought, and excluding records of facts, is, the clothing of things of the mind in the things of matter" (*EL*, I, 225).

After this, Emerson, who began by defining literature "in its largest sense" as "the books that are written" (*EL*, I, 218),[21] presses on to a wider application, so as to include "records of facts"--namely science and history--but the section on language comprises his thoughts about style. A passage in this section makes clear that "especially is it the office of the poet to perceive and use" the analogies between matter and mind (*EL*, I, 224); and the same point is made in the first lecture on Shakespeare (*EL*, I, 289-296). Both give essentially the same account of the poet's representativeness as the 1844 essay: his is "the largest power to receive and to impart" (*CW*, III, 6) the analogies between nature and spirit. From the first, then, the poet is specifically identified in Emerson's thought as the representative user of the language of nature.

Emerson's simplifications on the subjects of typology and the origin of language stimulated him to some fruitful ideas about poetic language, just as in our century Ernest Fenollosa's naive theories of the Chinese character influenced Ezra Pound.[22] Like Pound, Emerson used shaky premises to launch a very successful revolt in the name of nature against an artificial rhetoric. He continued throughout his career to campaign for the natural symbol in particular and an idiomatic "low style" in general; "in good writing words become one with things," (JMN, III, 271) was his motto.[23] If he was wrong in thinking that savages converse in figures, he was right that there is a fossil poetry in words; if he was wrong in saying that cunning people correspond to foxes and spiteful ones to snakes, he was right about the imaginative appropriateness and force of such analogies; if he was wrong in thinking that nature is the mirror of spirit, he was right about the falsity of speech which aims at rhetoric and not at the referent of the words.

But try to pluck Emerson's literary program from his metaphysical arbor and the whole vine comes with it. There is an ambivalence in his idea of nature which creates an ambiguity in his idea of language. On the one hand, Emerson says that thought should be connected with "its proper symbol" (CW, I, 29); on the other, he says merely that thought should be expressed in images (CW, I, 30). In the first case, an exact natural correspondence is implied; in the second case,freedom of choice is implied. This contradiction, to be sure, is always resolvable by the theory that inspiration will necessarily make the right choice. As Emerson puts in in "History,"

> The universal nature, too strong for the petty nature of the bard, sits on his neck and writes through his hand; so that when he seems to vent a mere caprice and wild

> romance, the issue is an exact allegory.
> (CW, II, 34)

Moreover, after Nature he seems to have rejected the idea of exact correspondences. As early as 1835 he had begun to be impatient of the limitations of Swedenborgian typology (L, I, 450-451). In "The Poet" he went out of his way to criticize the mystics for nailing a symbol to one meaning, emphasizing that "all symbols are fluxional; all language is vehicular and transitive, and is good, as ferries and horses are, for conveyance, not as farms and houses are, for homestead" (CW, III, 34). This statement, which itself admirably fulfills in the utterance of Emerson's requirements for poetic diction, is really truer to his own position even as early as the Lord's Supper sermon than the second proposition of "Language" is.

The fluxional aspect of symbolism played an increasingly important part in Emerson's literary thought after 1840. Doubtless this was partly caused by a growing acceptance of the theory of evolution, which gave him a sense of the continual metamorphosis of nature, together with an extreme idealism which emphasized the illusory nature of phenomena. The last portion of "Woodnotes II" and the essay "Illusions" are perhaps the best expressions of these two developments. In "Art and Criticism" (1859) he discusses the flux of symbols under the heading of "metonymy," as one of the three chief tools of rhetoric. (The other two are "the low style" and "compression.") Metonymy, he says, means "using one word or image for another. It is a low idealism. Idealism regards the world as symbolic, and all these symbols as fugitive and convertible expressions" (CW, XII, 299-300). If the basis for the individual symbol is the symbolic quality of Nature, the basis for metonymy is the flux of nature. On the one hand, no one symbol permanently covers a meaning:

> Nature itself is a vast trope, and all particular natures are tropes. As the bird alights on the bough, then plunges into the air again, so the thoughts of God pause but for a moment in any form. All thinking is analogizing, and it is the use of life to learn metonymy.
> (CW, VIII, 15)

On the other hand,

> In nature, each individual symbol plays innumerable parts, as each particle of matter circulates in turn through every system. The central indentity enables any one symbol to express successively all the qualities and shades of real being.

"In the transmission of the heavenly waters," Emerson continues, "every hose fits every hydrant" (CW, IV, 121); and in his essay on "Beauty," he asserts, "The feat of the imagination is in showing the convertibility of every thing into every other thing" (CW, VI, 304).

But while Emerson jettisons the dogmatic system of Swedenborg and celebrates the incessant metamorphosis of nature, the freedom of the poet, and the fugacity of the symbol, he continues to hold that there is a definite intellectual order to nature. The idea of evolution, in fact, is advanced in the introductory chapter of "Poetry and Imagination" as evidence that nature is an orderly chain of ascending analogies which the poet can interpret. Natural objects, he says, "are really parts of a symmetrical universe, like words of a sentence; and if their true order is found, the poet can read their divine significance as orderly as in a Bible" (CW, VIII, 8). "There is no choice of words for him who clearly sees the truth. That provides him with the best word," he declares later, as he does throughout his career, in the section on "Creation" (CW, VIII, 33).

Emerson is therefore poised halfway between symbolism and allegory. Although the disparity between the order which is postulated in nature is ideally the same as the order the mind desires to make of nature because of the immanence of God in man, this identity is not achieved in practice, because of human limits.

To Emerson's theory of language this ambivalence is a great advantage. The assumption of correspondence gives a kind of divine authenticity to the symbol, while the emphasis on flux puts a premium on freshness. This may be inconsistent philosophy but it is profound aesthetics. An effective metaphor or symbol does convince, is true; "a happy symbol is a sort of evidence that your thought is just," as Emerson shrewdly puts it (CW, VIII, 13). And, as he also observes, "only words that are new fit exactly the thing" (JMN, V, 246).

However, the disparity becomes a problem in Emerson's discussions of form, because it makes it impossible for him to arrive at a standard of form which is other than superliterary and super-human. In "The Poet," for example, two views of the subject seem to be advanced. At times, Emerson says that "poems are a corrupt version of some text in nature with which they ought to be made to tally" (CW, III, 25). "Poetry was all written before time was" and is only discovered, not created by the poet (CW, III, 8). But he also says simply that form depends upon soul; the "argument" informs the work as the soul makes the body (CW, III, 3, 9-10). The first approach, which is Platonic,[24] implies an ideal standard, even a preexisting type for the poem; the second, that the poem is an entirely new creation. To Emerson, these theories are two sides of the same thing: because the individual soul shares in the world-soul, the poet's mind can be said to merge with the divine aura which breathes through forms and create a work which is like a work of nature, one of the possible forms in the divine mind (*CW*, III, 26f). The second is his practical position; form is left up to the poet's inspiration. The first, though theoretically compatible with it, holds up a standard which only the ideal poem can achieve. All efforts which lack perfect inspiration are therefore bound to be literary failures.

The advantage for language and the obstacle to form inherent in Emerson's idea of a rhetoric based on correspondence are shown further in his interpretation of the concept of imagination, "the essential gift of the Poet" (*EL*, I, 289).

"Genius is almost a convertible word with imagination," Emerson wrote,[25] and imagination in Emerson's use of the word could be defined as the idea of genius applied to poetry. When he distinguishes between imagination and fancy, which is much more seldom than he contrasts genius and talent, it is on the same grounds--the one has its source and purpose in the universal, the other is just facile play.[26] "Imagination," like the others, was originally borrowed from Coleridge, but not, evidently, until 1835 (*JMN*, V, 76), after Emerson's idea of correspondence had begun to congeal. To this idea Emerson fitted his use of the term. For him imagination means most of all, literally, an image-making power. It is the faculty of mind which corresponds to the symbolic quality of nature, "the nomination of the causal facts, the laws of the soul, by the physical facts" (*J*, IX, 127). It has two powers, Emerson writes in 1846: the perception of "the symbolic character of things and treating them as representative," and second, "the tenaciousness of an image, cleaving unto it and letting it not go, and, by the treatment, demonstrating that this figment of thought is as palpable and objective to the poet as is the ground on which he stands" (J, VII, 160). This explanation shows the accuracy of Vivian Hopkins' observation that in Emerson the term has "a certain fragmentary quality," compared to Coleridge's conception of imagination as a controlling unifying power.[27] Emerson's man of imagination is a virtuoso with symbols. "His imperial muse tosses the creation like a bauble from hand to hand, and uses it to embody any caprice of thought that is uppermost in his mind" (CW, I, 52). Particularly after 1840, Emerson cites the property of metamorphosis in nature to justify the untrammeled celebration of sheer activity of imagination. A fascinating example of this is a passage on "tropes" written at Nantasket and later used in the lecture on "The Poet;"

> The metamorphosis of Nature shows itself in nothing more than this, that there is no word in our language that cannot become typical to us of Nature by giving it emphasis. The world is a Dancer; it is a Rosary; it is a Torrent; it is a Boat; a Mist; a Spider's Snare; it is what you will; and the metaphor will hold, and it will give the imagination keen pleasure. Swifter than light the world converts itself into that thing you name . . . . There is nothing small or mean to the soul. It derives as grand a joy from symbolizing the Godhead or his universe under the form of a moth or a gnat as of a Lord of Hosts. Must I call the heaven and the earth a maypole and country fair with booths, or an anthill, or an old coat, in order to give you the shock of pleasure which the imagination loves and the sense of spiritual greatness?

> Call it a blossom, a rod, a wreath of parsley, a tamarisk-crown, a cock, a sparrow, the ear instantly hears and the spirit leaps to the trope.
>
> (J, VI, 18-19)

This activity is what really delighted Emerson in writers such as Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Herbert.[28] And it is this which is given most emphasis in "The Poet." Emerson most desires a sustained inspired utterance, as in the case of Swedenborg, before whom "the metamorphosis continually plays" (CW, III, 35). The rhapsodic style of the essay itself, not really typical of Emerson except in "The Method of Nature," may be caused by too much straining for the kind of abandonment he commends.[29]

In "Poetry and Imagination" the same view is given even greater emphasis. The "essential mark" of poetry, Emerson says, "is that it betrays in every word instant activity of mind, shown in new uses of every fact and image, in preternatural quickness or perception of relations" (CW, VIII, 17). In this essay, the ideas of poetry and imagination are indistinguishable; because of a last minute shift in the manuscript the definition of the two powers of imagination, quoted above, becomes a definition of poetry (CW, VIII, 27).[30] The whole section entitled "Poetry," in fact, was designed in the original lecture version as remarks on the topic of imagination.[31]

The aesthetic effectiveness of a mere plentitude of images is demonstrated by Emerson's best work, and the effect is so familiar that the single example of the passage on tropes is sufficient. What concerns us here is the weakness of imagination as a theory of form. This too is clear. As Charles Feidelson says, "when Emerson projects a totally poetic universe, he deprives himself of any brake on the transmutation of form." Mere activity of imagination, in a world-view where any particle can represent the universe, leads to "a spontaneous dance of self-determining and autonomous symbols," an organization like a bag of duck-shot.[32]

Of this Emerson was keenly aware. His sentences, as he wrote to Carlyle, seemed to him like mutually repellent particles (E-C, 185). This might have been another reason for his making the unusual three-part anatomy of Shakespeare's genius in the 1835 lecture discussed above. "It is plain," he concludes his section on the poetic power, "that however gorgeous and elevated is this power of creation or of subjecting nature to the thought of man yet it has this vice that it leaves us without any measure or standard for comparing thought with thought. Each passing thought or emotion filling the whole sky of the poet's mind and bringing a new world of images to embody and adorn it, he is in no way differenced from the man of diseased mind." Therefore Emerson proposes reason as a "special check to the excess of imagination," for while imagination seizes the part, reason contemplates the whole, and places the parts in the right proportion (EL, I, 296, 297).

After 1836, "imagination" virtually disappears from Emerson's critical vocabulary for five years, nor until the lecture and essay on "The Poet" does Emerson again discuss at any length the symbolic use of nature for poetic language. During this time, as we have seen, Emerson's writings on aesthetic subjects tend to dilate on the theme of the universal mind as creator of all art, and he comes to emphasize passiveness and total spontaneity as prerequisites to the creative act. It is not at all surprising, then, to see the imagination reintroduced in the writing of the forties with any earlier checks removed. The imagination has now become the only interpreter of the poet's universe (J, VI, 159).

But despite his apotheosis of imagination, Emerson did not dismiss the need for an organizing principle, though he may have despaired of his own ability in this department. "A glance at my own manuscripts might teach me that all my poems are unfinished," he wrote in 1841, ". . . yet when I open a printed volume of poems I look imperatively for art" (J, VI, 98). "It is much to write sentences: it is more to add method, and write out the spirit of your life symmetrically . . . . to arrange many general reflections in their natural order so that I shall have one homogeneous piece, a Lycidas, an Allegro, a Penseroso, a Hamlet, a Macbeth, a Midsummer-Night's Dream,--this continuity is for the great" (J, VI, 47-48). Most of his examples, to say the least, are not particularly apt, but the desire for order was genuine. "Whilst I see a true painting, I feel how it was made; I feel that genius organizes, or it is lost."

But he added, fatalistically, "It is the gift of God" (J, V, 538-539). He himself acquiesced quite early in the assurance that although he would have no system, "the truthspeaker may dismiss all solicitude as to the proportion and congruency of the aggregate of his thoughts, so long as he is a faithful reporter of particular impressions" (J, V, 327). Still, it is unfair to take him at his word. Common sense, fortified by correspondence, supplied him with at least two kinds of metaphors for order, which will be discussed in the next sections.

iii

"Diamond & lampblack . . . are the same substance differently arranged. Let it teach the importance of Composition" (JMN, V, 233). Like "rhyme" and "language" "Composition" is another of those double-faced rhetorical terms which Emerson defined correspondentially. It means both the arrangement of parts in a discourse and in nature. In 1835, Emerson noted in his journal the difficulty and effectiveness of achieving a "juxtaposition & inter-action of lines & sentences that singly would have been of little worth & short date. Rightly is this art named composition & the composition has manifold the effect of the component parts." Composition was the "tool of Synthesis" used to arrange the individual insights "each of which in its turn, filled the whole sky of the poet" (JMN, V, 39, 40). It was, in other words, the practical antidote to imagination which Emerson generalizes into "Reason" in the lecture on Shakespeare (EL, I, 296f).

The necessity of composition in writing--always a problem for a diarist--begins to concern Emerson around 1831 (JMN, III, 270-271). His attitude toward it, however, before long becomes colored by his increased sensitivity to the same principle in nature. The Paris natural history exhibition, in particular, brought home to him not only man's relation to nature but the presence of a composition or unity in variety in nature itself (JMN, IV, 198-200; EL, I, 7-10). The beauty of natural composition, however, impressed Emerson most strongly in his remembrance of how seashells lost their attractiveness when taken away from the beach (JMN, IV, 291; EL, I, 73-74). This recollection becomes one of the exempla Emerson uses in "Each and All," his best-known expression of the idea: "All are needed by each one; / Nothing is fair or good alone" (CW, IX, 4). And in the second lecture on Shakespeare in 1835, the ideas of natural and literary composition are bound together with the help of the same anecdote. Composition, Emerson says, is "a law that lies at the foundation of literature" and also "is the most powerful secret of Nature's workmanship." Just as objects are more beautiful in composition than alone, "an advantage precisely analogous, do our thoughts obtain when put together by their natural affinities" (EL, I, 317). Synthesis, he says, "makes the difference between the rhapsody of the Pythoness or the chant of the improvisatore . . . and the elaborate written poem" (EL, I, 318).

This notion of composition in nature and writing helps shape Emerson's conception of art and beauty. Like Nature herself beauty, in another definition suggested by Coleridge, is "il piu nell' uno," or many in one (CW, III, 24).[33] The artist seeks the unity in the variety of nature and tries to represent the complex harmony in his own work. A fine image from Nature describes the landscape, divided into farms, as integrated by the horizon, which is thus the "property" of the poet (CW, I, 8).[34]

Emerson's idea of literary composition can best be inferred from his own practice. Indeed, the special interest of his generalizations about composition summarized above is that they immediately suggest his own practice. "The whole fascination of life for him," O. W. Firkins says without much exaggeration, "lay in the disclosure of identity in variety, that is in the concurrence, the running together, of several distinct images or ideas."[35] This is a standard Emerson technique from paragraph to paragraph, or from stanza to stanza, as in this example from "The World-Soul:"

> Yet there in the parlor sits
>   Some figure of noble guise,--
> Our angel, in a stranger's form
>   Or woman's pleading eyes;
> Or only a flashing sunbeam
>   In at the windowpane;
> Or Music pours on mortals
>   Its beautiful distain.
>
> (_CW_, IX, 16)

The device, as this passage suggests, depends largely upon the richness or poverty of the language. At first, sentimental platitudes like "noble guise," "our angel in a stranger's form," and "woman's pleading eyes" weaken the effect of iteration and make it look like a fetch to fill in the metrical pattern. But the next image is better and the last, which is really fine, almost makes a success of the whole stanza, which now seems constructed to lead up to it; and the final image itself gains I think, by being put in this place in the composition. In Emerson's poetry, the "catalogues" are not usually so lucky; the tetrameter couplet or ABAB quatrain he most often uses, plus his usual practice (as in lines 2-4 of the above stanza) of listing one image per line, make for a monotonous singsong effect, not enough variety to the unity. "Bacchus," perhaps, is his greatest success in this department. The poem is a series of improvisations on the common theme of the true wine of poets--inspiration. If I may construe it according to the theory of the metre-making argument, all stanzas--with the partial exception of the sixth, where the first two lines are not well-related to the rest--are built around single propositions which the poet develops as far as enthusiasm and imagery will permit. The pitch of the argument, the suppleness of the form, the force of individual images like "Wine that is shed / Like the torrents of the sun / Up the horizon walls" (CW, IX, 126), and the dominant metaphor all sustain the effect and help make the poem one of Emerson's best.

The lyrical passages of Emerson's prose, however, furnish better examples of the il piu nell' uno in his style. Here is a paragraph from "Compensation:"

> The world globes itself in a drop of dew. The microscope cannot find the animalcule which is less perfect for being little. Eyes, ears, taste, smell, motion, resistance, appetite, and organs of reproduction that take hold on eternity,--all find room to consist in the small creature. So do we put our life into every act. The true doctrine of omnipresence is that God reappears with all his parts in every moss and cobweb. The value of the universe contrives to throw itself into every point. If the good is there, so is the evil; if the affinity, so the repulsion; if the force, so the limitation.
> (CW, II, 101-102)

The dewdrop, the animalcule, moss and cobweb variously image the same idea, which is stated more abstractly in the fourth, sixth, and seventh sentences, the last of which ties the paragraph up neatly. From one point of view, the plenitude is superfluous; there is little that is inevitable about the order of the first six sentences at least. It looks as if each sentence except perhaps the third could stand by itself; except for "so" and "if" transitions are eliminated so that each successive proposition comes with a little jolt. At the same time, this enhances all the sentences as if they had been set off as lines in a stanza of poetry. The effect of the whole also gains from the juxtaposition, partly from the blend of abstract and concrete, with the terse conclusion, partly from the variation of rhythm among the sentences. Finally, the form is appropriate to the idea.

But even if we admit Emerson can be a master of the image, the sentence, and the paragraph from the slender examples given so far, the composition of a thirty-page essay is another matter. A poem is made up of individual poems, Emerson said, and this bears fruit in the case of "Bacchus." But an essay, one would expect, needs more than a single metaphor or thought to tie all its paragraphs together. Emerson's problem is suggested by his philosophy: "a too rapid unity or unification and a too exclusive devotion to parts are the Scylla and Charybdis" (J, VII, 118). In his case, the philosophy leaned toward Scylla and the writing toward Charybdis.

From what we know of Emerson's practice of amalgamating journal entries to form lectures, shuffling the parts of the lecture from performance to performance, sometimes even while he was delivering it, then cannibalizing the lectures and adding more journal material to make up the essay, his notion of composition as an arrangement of parts is an apt description of his method. Emerson liked to support this notion by the metaphor of architecture. "What is writ is a foundation of a new superstructure & a guide to the eye for new foundation, so that the work rises tower upon tower with ever new & total strength of the builder" (JMN, V, 198). In this view, rhetoric "or the Building of Discourse" should raise "Profoundest thoughts, sublime images, dazzling figures" stone on stone until "out of the quarry you have erected a temple, soaring in due gradation . . ." (JMN, V, 409). But as is pointed out by Stephen Whicher, who has traced the construction of "Self-Reliance" from some forty-six journal entries, Emerson's mosaic technique, where the parts are finished before the plan for the whole is drawn up, greatly impedes the kind of harmony he wishes to achieve.[36] Emerson tends to move paragraphs or passages from journal to discourse to discourse making stylistic improvements as he goes but not paying too much attention to the continuity between thought-units. An extreme example is "Poetry and Imagination." After studying the vicissitudes of this essay, as it developed through a number of lectures beginning as early as 1841, I am convinced that except for the introductory section, no part of it, in the finished work or in any lecture, has any fixed order. The essay can only be considered as a collection aphorisms on various topics. Judging from the latest extant manuscript, the last ten pages in particular seem to have undergone a radical last-minute reshuffle, involving a dozen or so units of composition. Little of the wording is changed, but the order is quite different, a fact which might not be suspected from Emerson's stringing some seven short and imperfectly connected thought-units into a single paragraph of "Transcendency" (CW, VIII, 70-74).[37]

But it is not fair to pick on Emerson in his old age, when Cabot was beginning to take over his editorial work.[38] All the texts arranged by Cabot and Edward Emerson are more or less corrupt anyway, and more than the footnotes of the Centenary Edition indicate, because of the amount of cutting and patching that was done to prepare Emerson's lecture notes for publication. When exerpts from many different lectures are brought together, as in "Powers and Laws of Thought," the conglomeration is of course most disconnected. When only one lecture is used as the text, as with "Instinct and Inspiration," long passages are excised (sometimes without notice), usually because Emerson has used them in other essays. Some passages in the manuscript which are little more than rough jottings are deceptively organized in neat paragraphs. And there are copying errors too. Of course, the fact that the unusual desultoriness of "Poetry and Imagination" and other later and posthumous works does not seem to have bothered critics is a sign that this is what one expects of Emerson.

Yet there are degrees of success in Emersonian composition, as can be illustrated by "The Poet." This essay was evidently composed mostly for Essays, Second Series and from journal entries, but it drew also from the earlier lecture on the same topic, as well as from an 1843 lecture on New England literature, which in turn took some of its passages from the 1837 lecture "The Eye and Ear." The extent of Emerson's success and failure in organization may be briefly noted. On the one hand, the essay does have a rough ordering, unobtrusively supplying a clue, as a number of Emerson essays do, in a single sentence of the exordium, where Emerson proposes to consider "the nature and functions of the Poet . . . the means and materials he uses, and . . . the general aspect of the art in the present time" (CW, III, 4). The three subdivisions could be clearer than Emerson makes them, but they seem to be pp. 5-13, 13-37, and 37-42, respectively. There is also enough order to the progression for Walter Blair and Clarence Faust to cite it as an example of conscious method.[39] The initial assertion of the poet's representativeness and popularity as expresser for men is substantiated, in the second section, by showing how poets and men generally love and use the symbols nature provides and are intoxicated and freed by the act of imagination. Having shown the role and significance of the poet, and seeing none on the horizon, Emerson concludes with timely exhortations to aspiring bards. On the whole, the essay is perhaps better managed than the lecture, where the character of the poet is not introduced until the mid-point.[40] Nevertheless, there are some rather awkward twists to the essay's movement, some of which can be traced to Emerson's method of accretion. For example, near the beginning, after declaring that the poet is representative by virtue of his powers to receive and impart (CW, III, 6), Emerson abruptly introduces a trinity myth--the three children of the universe --and shows the poet as representing the sayer, or beauty (CW, III, 6-8). The misty fancifulness of the passage is rather different from what precedes and follows it, and the idea somewhat conflicts with his claim, just made and followed up later, that the poet is a seer as well as a sayer, though Emerson does want to emphasize the latter in this essay. What has happened is that in the process of reworking the idea of the poet's representativeness given in the earlier lecture, Emerson is grafting on a metaphor taken from the lecture on New England literature, which expressed his familiar idea that beauty is one of the three faces of God.[41]

An example of a complete miscarriage is the passage Emerson says "a certain poet" told him (CW, III, 22-24). The passage seems needlessly dilatory; its tone is very unfortunate, since it tries to be expository and rhapsodic at the same time; and it wanders from the point, which is to show the "self-regulated motion or change" wrought by genius (CW, III, 22), into an assertion of the immortality of the poet's song, so that Emerson has to swerve back in the next paragraph by saying, "But nature has a higher end," etc. In fact this whole passage is lifted almost verbatim from the 1839 lecture on "Genius," and plopped without much ceremony into the essay.[42] In the lecture, incidentally, the mask of the "certain poet" is not used and the passage is presented as Emerson's own thought.

Finally, it is a little strange to see that just after mystics, in the person of Behmen, are criticized for nailing a symbol to one sense, Swedenborg is praised without qualification. Actually, in previous lectures, Swedenborg was also the one criticized, and the whole section in "The Poet" from pp. 34-36 appeared in the lecture on New England literature as a unit on Swedenborg. Since Emerson's tone there is almost entirely approving, he may have decided that it was more proper for Behmen to be his scapegoat in the essay.[43] This passage, too, is introduced abruptly, without warning, though it is engineered to tie in nicely with the following section, beginning "I look in vain for the poet whom I describe . . . ." (CW, III, 37).

On the whole, "The Poet" seems to be a representative Emerson essay in respect to composition. It wanders--perhaps unusually so, judging from the number of initial "for's" and "but's" used for conjunctive paste; tends to fall apart into a dozen or so chunks; it should have been condensed at least one-fourth; and yet still maintains an order which a careful reader can follow. At times, the ordering principle of an Emerson essay seems laughably tenuous, as when Emerson says at the beginning of "Circles" that the title metaphor "may conveniently serve us to connect many illustrations of human power in every department" (CW, II, 301). On the other hand, he sometimes gets unexpected success in ordering the most diverse and fragmentary materials; "Experience" is a clear example. His power of composition can be appreciated if only by noting the places where it is absent, as in "Poetry and Imagination."

To be sure, Emerson finally left the matter of composition up to fate. The gradual crystallization of thought, he wrote in 1832, is "God's architecture" (JMN, III, 316). In his sermon-writing days at the Second Church, his technique was simply to take the mean of his Friday's perceptions for the subject of the next day's sermon (YES, xxxi). He was still doing the same thing ten years later, with the additional authorization of the universal mind.

> The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. This is only microscopic criticism. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency: All these verses and thoughts were as spontaneous at some time to that man as any one was. Being so, they were not his own, but above him the voice of simple, necessary, aboriginal nature, and, coming from so narrow experience as one mortal, they must be strictly related even the farthest ends of his life, and, seen at the perspective of a few ages, will appear harmonious and univocal.
> (J, V, 224-225)

This observation seems intended to describe the whole body of man's work, but it can apply to an individual Emerson piece too. Perhaps the best way of putting Emerson's theory and practice of composition is to say that it is like nature's--"not the trimming & turfing of gardens, but the showing the true harmony of the unshorn landscape with horrid thickets & bald mountains & the balance of the land & sea" (JMN, V, 411). "A true argument," he wrote in 1834, does not impose arbitrary classification on its facts, but rather unfolds itself like Plato's Dialogues, which are "natural classifications containing their own reason in themselves," just as "a study of the cattle on the mountain-side as they graze, is more suggestive of the truth than the inspection of their parts in the dissection-room" (JMN, IV, 289). Emerson, as Alcott observed, "leaves things in the place in which Nature put them."[44] We do not always bless him for it. In coping with an Emerson landscape, the critic cannot expect to see much order short of the horizon set by the topic. There is a general propriety of hills and hollows but often the shrubbery grows rather wild.

iv

"And yet relation appears . . ." as Stevens' Conoisseur of Chaos says. After allowing for a percentage of failure and abandonment in Emerson's composition, after admitting that we are never going to reduce "The Poet" to a pattern as The Defense of Poesy can be reduced, it remains that Emerson does organize his prose to a greater degree than has yet been mentioned. There is always more order than we first notice. We begin "Intellect" and think we are wandering; then, after a time, appears the general proposition which snaps nine pages into place: "In the intellect constructive . . . we observe the same balance of two elements as in intellect receptive" (CW, II, 334), and we see that Emerson has had hold of a general subject (intellect receptive) all the while. Or in "Self-Reliance" we come to: "The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency" (CW, II, 56). The other terror? Oh yes--conformity. But it was introduced, six pages before, in simple antithesis to self-reliance, with no indication to the effect "now, reader, we shall discuss the two threats to self-reliance." But presently comes the conclusion, "I hope in these days we have heard the last of conformity and consistency" (CW, II, 60), and the ten pages spring together as a unit, not, of course, clarifying all the vagaries therein, but reassuring us that the thread is still in hand.

These intimations of order, which are continually turning up in the essays, keep us searching for more, just as we try to infer a structure in "Song of Myself." Not that it is desirable to reduce the essays to patterns; even if that were possible it would spoil them. Emerson himself maintained that surprise is a vital element in the works of genius, as much as in the advent of inspiration in the mind. "If you desire to arrest attention, to surprise," he wrote in his journal, "do not give me the facts in the order of cause of effect, but drop one or two links in the chain, and give me with a cause, an effect two or three times removed" (J, V, 63-64).[45] Yet as this passage suggests, complete randomness is no solution either. "The problem of the poet is to unite freedom with precision; to give the pleasure of color, and be not less the most powerful of sculptors" (CW, VIII, 72). What is wanted is the suggestion of a continuity to balance the variety of illustration and digression, making it intelligible and more rich, as the suggestion of an underlying metre adds to the pleasure of variation in reading verse. It is partly a matter of taste, of course, how much variation is desirable.

Emerson does not theorize about the structure of poetry or prose, beyond his general and infrequent remarks about compositions. The core of his theory of style is the image, and the most specific thing he says about structure is that form depends upon soul and should be natural. Consequently, in this section we shall have to extort from his practice the theory it suggests. The conclusion will not be Emerson's own formulation but it will tally with the rest of his ideas about style, because here too Emerson's method corresponds with that of nature.

Analysts of Emerson's style from his son to contemporary critics have noticed that his prose has a tendency to "ascend," to proceed from rudimentary common-sense considerations to the highest, the spiritual level.[46] Nature is the most obvious example, taking up in turn commodity, beauty, language, discipline, idealism, and spirit. Emerson clearly desired his own order to mirror nature's; making notes for the book in 1836, he wrote, "Thus through nature there is a striving upward" (JMN, V, 146). The book, but even more its subject, supplies a kind of type for succeeding essays such as "Compensation," "Love," "Experience," "Nature," "Success," and the arrangement of topics in Conduct of Life as a whole.[47] Many other essays also make use of ascendency in part as an ordering principle, and its aesthetic importance on Emerson should not be underestimated. This can be illustrated by comparing two adjacent essays in Conduct of Life, "Considerations by the Way" and "Beauty." The first to my mind is the poorest in the book. After the exordium, its argument begins rather promisingly with balanced and provocative comments on the relative uses of great men and masses; his assertion that even the unthinking mob is necessary to the world-order, leads smoothly to the general proposition that good comes out of evil (CW, VI, 246-253). But when this has been illustrated at great length (253-262), the essay breaks apart into a series of "rules of life" (263-276), which seem to have little connection with each other and none with the previous subject. Emerson's success in epigram and anecdote seems to me about uniform (much below his best but better than his worst) throughout the essay, but when the initial impetus is lost this turns into mere garrulity.

"Beauty," on the other hand, is saved from disaster by the method which "Considerations by the Way" abandons. It begins by rambling for five pages about the limitations of science, in order eventually to make the point that beauty, rather than natural science, "is the form under which the intellect prefers to study the world" (CW, VI, 287). After a few more preliminaries, Emerson--with the essay already one-third over--is ready to discuss beauty. But, he says, "I am warned by the ill fate of many philosophers not to attempt a definition of Beauty. I will rather enumerate a few of its qualities" (CW, VI, 289). He then lists seven qualities; as is often the case, the subsequent discussion, deferred for another dozen lines while Emerson plays with mythology, does not treat all the points listed nor in the order given, and the discussion would fall apart into miscellany, like the previous essay, were it not that he deploys the three-level conception of beauty used in Nature: beauty as a matter of forms in nature and art (290-296), beauty in man (296-302), and beauty as perceived by imagination (302-306). Emerson neatly sums up the progression at the end:

> Thus there is a climbing scale of culture, from the first agreeable sensation which a sparkling gem or a scarlet stain affords the eye, up through fair outlines and details of the human face and form, signs and tokens of thought and character in manners, up to the ineffable mysteries of the intellect. (306)

To be sure, within each section there are some odd turns. In the first, especially, there is no reason why Emerson emphasizes the organic, ascending, economical, true, and enduring qualities of beauty in that order; on the contrary, the first and third really go together. Yet his sense of direction picks up as he moves to the next two sections, and the sense of momentum plus the guiding conception of beauty stated in the passage above gives this part of the essay a sufficient balance of the causal and the casual to satisfy both the desire for order and the desire for variation.

Now "Considerations by the Way" does attempt to do this also, even in the rules-of-life section: the rules discussed are health, cheerfulness, vocation, conversation, friendship, and making yourself necessary, in that order; there is a progression of a sort. But the conception which ties them together is so tenuous and the individual parts are so autonomous that one feels all the headings are indifferently pertinent or impertinent. Indeed, in Emerson's writings there is frequently such a conflict between genuine movement and mere topicality. One questions if a given essay is a progression or a dilation. Consider the method of "Circles." It is very clear, and in a general way ascending. After a page of introduction, Emerson shows (1) "There are no fixtures in nature" (CW, II, 302-306); (2) "There are no fixtures to men" (306-317)--he himself is "only an experimenter" (317-318); but (3) the instability of nature is encompassed and engendered by the central life of the soul (318); and so (4) the way of life is to keep drawing new circles (319-322). But this is a small skeleton for so long an essay. The second point, for instance, is made in one paragraph, then illustrated by nine examples: moods, relations, valor, idealism, conversation, literature, religion, nature, and virtue, respectively. There is a kind of upward direction to these examples themselves, but how many of them can the main lines of the essay take before organic form falls into the fallacy of imitation and Emerson's baroque becomes rococco? "What is the term of the ever-flowing metamorphosis" (CW, VIII, 18). I would say that "Circles" succeeds better than, say, the section of "Civilization" which tries the same thing (CW, VII, 21-25); another's taste may differ. "Books" is the reductio ad absurdum of Emerson's centrifugal tendency. The criterion for success seems to be in a balance, in some but not too much variation of the upward or onward movement.

The same is true for the success of a second ordering principle, which might be called antithesis. The model for this is "Nominalist and Realist," where Emerson speaks first for the latter, then for the former point of view, and finally for both in a third section. The difference between this method and that of ascendency is sufficiently clear that Sherman Paul becomes confusing when he calls both "dialectic" in Emerson's Angle of Vision.[48] Other works which make use of this method are "Politics," "New England Reformers," many chapters of English Traits, "Society and Solitude," and "Fate." These essays all show two opposing principles in conflict, usually ending with some sort of rapprochement or solution; as Emerson puts it in "Society and Solitude"--one of the most cautiously balanced of the group, "Nature delights to put us between extreme antagonisms, and our safety is in the skill with which we keep the diagonal line" (CW, VII, 15).

A slightly different kind of polarity Emerson also uses, especially in his juxtaposition of whole essays, is to view the same field from the "inside" and the "outside." For example, "Manners" and "Character" or "Behavior" and "Culture" are the visible and invisible sides of the same thing. In this way, the first series of Essays fall into six pairs of complements, without too much forcing. The individual is the complement of history; the law of the spirit is the fact in the soul underlying compensation; "Love" describes primarily the affections and "Friendship" the relation of affection to its object; prudence, as Emerson defines it, is the practical face of heroism; the central life of the soul, which makes the circles, is the Oversoul; and art is the construct of intellect.[49]

Within this volume, the brilliant but amorphous-seeming "History" gains clarity if read as a celebration of the same thing from two complementary points of view. Emerson's summation says, "in the light of these two facts, namely, that the mind is One, and that nature is its correlative, history is to be read and written" (CW, II, 38), and looking back over the essay, we can see--without much forcing--that there are two main stages to its development, corresponding to the two "facts." First, Emerson shows that in experience reading, people, and events become meaningful to the extent that we can identify with them (4-8). All inquiry into history tries to reduce the then to the now, to relate it to ourselves by finding unity of cause beneath the variety of appearance (11-12). Emerson then illustrates this point with four examples, biology (13-14), culture (14-15), art's relation to nature (15-16), and the artist's relation to his subject (16-17). Having reduced the many to one, Emerson reverses his perspective in the second part of the essay by showing the obverse, that the one has a property in the many, "there is nothing but is related to us" (17). Here he says that we get pleasure and insight in perceiving the relation of history to human nature, just as we do in perceiving the relation of architecture to physical nature (18-23). There is a correspondence between the course of history and a man's life (23-27), as there is between human nature and religion (27-29), literature (29-35), and nature (35-38).

This rather schematic analysis again raises the question, why worry about making order out of the essays? After all, the rich texture of "History" and Emerson's other best essays is their most impressive feature. Emerson himself damned consistency and is often at his best when he is most unpredictable. These objections are important. By the test of order "Love" is one of the best essays, but in fact one of the reasons it is not, in addition to the overpowering chastity of the idea and sentimentality of the rhetoric, is that it is too much an argument. One critic of "Compensation," Roland Lee, has suggested that the argument spoils that essay too, and in another article goes so far as to suggest that Emerson's "least impressive es[s]ays are those in which he analyzes the idea."[50]

Yet both the ordering principles discussed above are grounded in Emerson's view of the nature of things. As surely as the image reconciles the thought with its object, as surely as imagination operates to catch the flux of nature, ascension and antithesis work to organize the two kinds of metaphysical unity which most preoccupy Emerson: the idea of a scale of being, onto which Emerson comes to graft his theist's version of evolution, and the idea of dualism, which in a way is just a simpler manner of putting the first idea, by taking out the gradations and the movement. Because both these principles are basic to Emerson's philosophy, they are also basic to his literary method.

This is true even of the early sermons. The technique of "ascension", of course, is an obvious one for a preacher, whose job it is to turn the minds of the congregation from things below to things above, but it is especially well-suited to that central message of Unitarians and the transcendentalists alike: spiritual progress. Emerson's sermon on "The Education of the Soul" (S, 146), for example, pictures the individual as learning in turn from the material world, society, "external religion," and Reason itself. "The Increasing Knowledge of God" (S, 160) presents Emerson's typical view of religious history as a series of reformations from idol worship to a purely spiritual religion, which he envisages for New England in the near future.[51] There is a similar kind of upward movement, to a greater or less degree, in at least twenty-five percent of the sermons. As for antithesis, its importance in the sermons is secondary, but still pervasive, as can be seen by some of the titles Arthur McGiffert has given to the sermons: "Change and Permanence" (S, 6), "Pride and Humility" (S, 16), "Faith and Works" (S, 48), "Freedom and Dependence" (S, 53), "Solitude and Society" (S, 55), "Benevolence and Selfishness" (S, 65), "The Individual and the State" (S, 70), "Religious Liberalism and Rigidity" (S, 75), "Reason and Revelation" (S, 92), "Self and Others" (S, 104), and "Dependence and Independence" (S, 166). Other sermons use this principle in part.

As literary devices, the two ordering principles usually cannot be traced in too much detail, or the analysis breaks down. It is good that this is so; otherwise the essay would seem artificial. On the other hand, it is wrong not to expect any order whatsoever, because Emerson is trying to impart his observations according to natural order of the topic. In the case of "The Over-Soul," since the subject is none other than God himself, the essay is bound to fall apart into miscellaneous reportage of comings and goings; as W. T. Harris observed, dialectic is impossible because we are already at the summit.[52] A mundane topic, even so broad a one as "Experience," he is apt to treat more methodically. On the whole, we can conclude that in his structure of the argument, Emerson is forcing on his subject no more order than his perception of it entitles him to, but taking advantage of whatever order that perception furnishes. Admittedly, Emerson has defects in this respect which cannot be glossed over by the explanation that he is trying to be true to nature. Still, this does seem to be his intention. To take his own metaphor, he is "dotting a fragmentary curve" (CW, XII, 11), imperfect because his perception is imperfect, and his style, in a piece of essay length, cannot be organized otherwise, for greater neatness (or greater chaos) would traduce his thought.[53]

For Emerson the idea of an ordered universe is no longer a doctrine and not yet a matter of imagination only. This ambivalence has the positive effect of liberating the imagination and giving it a mission at the same time; the exhibition of correspondences, Emerson says in "Swedenborg," "if adequately executed, would be the poem of the world" (CW, IV, 120). On the other hand, this ambivalence makes broken mirrors out of all works of art, because it admits that the truth can only be imaged imperfectly. Nature and spirit reveal themselves partially, then stream away. It is not surprising, then, to hear Emerson say that beauty's chief qualities are evanescence and suggestiveness. "The statue is then beautiful when it begins to be incomprehensible, when it is passing out of criticism and can no longer be defined by compass and measuring wand, but demands an active imagination to go with it and to say what it is in the act of doing . . . . And of poetry the success is not attained when it lulls and satisfies, but when it astonishes and fires us with new endeavors after the unattainable" (CW, II, 179-180). In an endless suggestiveness, both in his theorizing and in his practice, Emerson was faithful to his sense of man's real yet partial relation to nature and spirit. In his style, he was unquestionably most successful in the individual metaphor, the sentence, the short passage. But even in areas where he was weaker, composition and structure, his practice, and what can be inferred about his theory, suggests that he was trying similarly to harmonize nature and spirit. On the whole, we can say the same of his theory of organization that has been said about his theory of language. It may reflect an old-fashioned philosophy, but it is still good aesthetics, for when well-realized, as in "Experience," it does justice both to the desire for order and the desire for multiplicity.

V

Perhaps the most convenient way to summarize Emerson's theory of art is to call it "organic," though this term has been much overworked and the many discussions of his "organicism" tend to confuse Emerson's ideas with the preconceptions of the individual critics.[54] Emerson's theory is organic in two broad ways, corresponding to the main concerns of the last two chapters. First, in genesis, art should be a spontaneous growth, "a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree" (CW, III, 22); its form depends upon the inspiration and not outside embellishment. Second, the form thus produced by the artist should somehow resemble external nature, because "all the parts and forms of Nature are the expression or production of divine faculties, and the same are in us" (CW, VIII, 43).

What Emerson does not really have in mind is that sort of theory which regards the work as an independent unit, organic in the sense that it is perfectly structured according to its own laws, as the bloodstream of a body or a leaf pervades, with its arteries, veins, and capillaries. This sort of theory regards art as related to nature only by analogy, whereas for Emerson the relation is mystically true in fact; the poet participates in the invention of nature (CW, III, 26), whose forms are both model and subject for him. The two theories imply each other and are by no means mutually exclusive, but the main concern of the first is an artistic order, while Emerson's is the natural order itself; "he always aimed at the universal rather than any particular unity."[55] As observers of the polarities in American literature have pointed out, Poe is the nineteenth century representative of the former theory.[56]

For Emerson, as noted above, since art is based on the natural order, success depends primarily upon unbroken perception of nature. "The poet, whose verses are to be spheral and complete, is one whom Nature cannot deceive, whatsoever face of strangeness she may put on" (CW, II, 340-341). "The rich poets, as Homer, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Raphael," Emerson writes in "The Poet," "resemble a mirror carried through the street, ready to render an image of every created thing" (CW, III, 41). The ideal writer, then, to apply one of Emerson's definitions of genius, is a man of perfect "sensibility to all the impressions of the outer world, a sensibility so equal that it receives accurately all impressions, and can truly report them, without excess or loss, as it received" (CW, X, 76). On the one hand, the entire world is a latent poem, waiting to be expressed; on the other, mind is capable of perceiving the world in all its relations and turning it into poetry. Emerson asserts this in "The Poet" (CW, III, 13-22) and dramatizes it, perhaps without intending to, in the contrast between the two poems "Merlin" I and II, which celebrate the poet's song and the poetry of nature, respectively.[57]

These two poems suggest also the two basic positions in which

Emerson pictures his poet. When his genius is active, he is a prophet and soothsayer, like Merlin; otherwise, he must be a seeker and student of nature. The latter is the attitude Emerson much more frequently presents, whether he is describing the elusiveness of nature, as in the "Tantalus" section of the second essay on "Nature" and such poems as "The Sphinx" and "Forerunners;" the poet going to school to nature's teachings, as in "Woodnotes II," "Monadnoc," and "Seashore;" or the acquiescence of the poet to whatever the rustic muse may bring, as in "Musketaquid" and the two poems about Saadi, who resembles Emerson in his cheerful life of sociable solitude.[58]

Both attitudes, with all the variations of the second, are touched on in the long, uneven poem "The Poet," which Emerson never completed. The second part begins,

> The gods talk in the breath of the woods,
> They talk in the shaken pine,
> And fill the long reach of the old seashore
> With dialogue divine;
> And the poet who overhears
> Some random word they say
> Is the fated man of men
> Whom the ages must obey . . .
> (CW, IX, 311-312)

Yet his perception is imperfect. "I see the scattered gleams" but "not yet a steadfast morn," the poet says (312). The celestial voices counsel him to wait, but his fancy cannot keep pace with nature's changes; he is but "a cripple of God, half true, half-formed" (315). He becomes discouraged and the gods themselves are impatient with his weakness. At last he begs them

> clothe these hands with power
> In just proportion,
> Nor plant immense designs
> Where equal means are none.

But he gets a mixed reply, according to his own nature:

> Means, dear brother, ask them not;
>   Soul's desire is means enow
> Pure content is angel's lot,
>   Thine own theatre art thou.
> (318)

And the poem breaks off with the poet still complaining and the spirits still giving reassuring but equivocal answers.[59]

Emerson's verses take us back again to the topic of inspiration. That is what bridges the gap between the mind and nature, and the poet's success in turning his materials into song is the product and proof of it. Emerson's theory of style as well as his theory of the creative process, however practical his discussions become, is solidly founded on this spiritual base. Emerson saw clearly enough that inspiration was a matter of execution as well as receptiveness, that nature must be translated into language for communication to be successful. The soul needs the body which it makes, the thought depends upon its expression. "The Mind must think by means of Matter; find Matter or Nature the means and the words of its thinking and expression," he wrote in 1868; but he added, "The world its school and university for Heaven or Thought" (J, X, 236). The definitive element in the writing, and the final purpose of the work is spiritual. The last stage of poetry is "transcendency." The nature of this spiritual purpose, and the extent to which it is inherently conducive to Emerson's idea of style, will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE PREACHER IN THE POET

One of Carlyle's lukewarm comments about Essays, Second Series was, "it is a sermon to me, as all your other deliberate utterances are" (E-C, 371). This side of Emerson, to some his least attractive, is always evident; he is more obviously the preacher than any other first-rate artist of the period. The continuity between the minister and the man of letters is clear also. The lyceum was his "pulpit," the lecture room the "true church of today" (J, V, 298). The great themes of his later work--the oversoul, self-reliance, compensation, the unity of the mind, correspondence--all are more or less of a religious or metaphysical nature; and all but the last are strongly anticipated in the sermons, indeed are almost as central to them as to the essays. Possibly this is unfortunate. Possibly it was because of his clerical background that Emerson now appears to be only a forerunner of Thoreau and Melville, a case of arrested development, as Dr. Channing seemed to him. On the other hand, we have seen that it was in the nature of this background to lead one of his temperament to a literary program which is brilliant, if unsystematic. It is also true, I think, that even Emerson's accomplishments as a prose stylist owe something to the strategies he used in the sermons to deal with the religious issues of the day.

The basic point of comparison is this. In both the sermons and the essays Emerson is searching for deeper interpretations of conventional, timeworn topics. In the first, the convention is most often set by doctrine and religious custom, in the second, more broadly, by the expectations of the prevailing moral and intellectual assumptions of the contemporary reader. Emerson's deeper interpretation is founded, directly or indirectly, upon his central principle of divine immanence. The ordinary meaning of his topic, say "self-reliance," Emerson subjects to redefinition in light of the idea of the infinitude of the private man, which he rightly said was his only teaching (J, V, 380f). "There is not a just or grand thought," he wrote in 1832, "but is made more round & infinite by applying it to the soul considered as the universe living from God within" (JMN, IV, 39). But at the same time, the principle depends upon the fact as an expression of it. It admits the partial truth of the conventional view, admits that there are two selves that may be relied on, and that principle in actuality is impure. As Emerson said in "The Transcendentalist," "of a purely spiritual life, history has afforded no example" (CW, I, 338). The success of Emerson's discourse depends upon the extent to which he can use facts as symbols without denying the reality of the facts themselves; and his own position can only be determined by the degree to which he is emphasizing the factuality or the ideality of the subject at hand. "Experience," for instance, finally comes down to relying on the God within (CW, III, 81), yet the affirmation is much different from that of the earlier essay, "Self-Reliance," because of the greater recognition of the distance between human life and ideal being.

When Emerson began preaching, the Unitarian church, was similarly caught between the claims of natural and revealed religion. The Bible was the inescapable fact. Channing in his 1824 Dudleian Lecture "On the Evidences of Revealed Religion," insisted that Christianity "is not only confirmed by miracles, but is in itself, in its very essence, a miraculous religion. It is not a system which the human mind might have gathered, in the ordinary exercise of its powers, from the ordinary course of nature."[1] Yet, as Channing also insisted, the Bible must be interpreted by the moral reason of man; it is "a book written for men, in the language of men, and . . . its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books."[2] When attacking Calvinism's view of God as immoral, Channing further asserted that although God's ways cannot be judged by man they must be consistent with the moral sense which God has given us. "The ultimate reliance of a human being is and must be on his own mind. To confide in God, we must first confide in the faculties by which he is apprehended."[3] And in "Christianity a Rational Religion," he went so far as to say that "Revelation is but a means" of "carrying forward reason to its perfection. I glory in Christianity because it enlarges, invigorates, exalts my rational nature. If I could not be a Christian without ceasing to be ratinnal, I should not hesitate as to my choice."[4]

This sort of ambivalence necessarily led to an exaltation of reason and moral sense on the one hand, and a conscientious attempt to fit scripture and doctrine to these claims on the other. Among the results of this were an increasing emphasis on the figurativeness of biblical language and the accidency of forms of worship. It was recognized that much of the Bible is not literal but poetic truth and that ritual and doctrine for the most part owe their origin not to divine ordinance but to the background and the character of the worshipper.[5] At the same time, the Unitarians continued to chart their own position in terms of historical Christianity, which sometimes only added to the vagueness of that position, as when Orville Dewey defined Unitarianism in terms of four cardinal Calvinist doctrines--atonement, depravity, regeneration, and election--redefining each one, however, beyond anything a Calvinist would have accepted.[6]

Emerson's sermons, especially when considered as forerunners to the essays, suggest what problems and possibilities for art were furnished by this Unitarian ambivalence of belief. When dealing with an ecclesiastical subject, Emerson tends, somewhat like Dewey in his article, to twist it away from its traditional associations, so that what was dogma before now becomes symbol. At the same time, because he still holds to the traditional form, a certain ambiguity is maintained. Prayer, for example, became meaningful for him when he stopped considering it as a form of worship and redefined it as the inclination of the soul. "Every desire of the human mind," he says in his first sermon, "Pray without Ceasing," "is a prayer uttered to God and registered in heaven" because"the minds of men are not so much independent existences, as they are ideas present to the mind of god . . . he is not so much the observer of your actions, as he is the potent principle by which they are bound together . . ." (YES, 4). Prayer, that is, can be conceived as God speaking to himself, since Emerson has for the moment considered the soul "as the Universe living from God within." On the other hand, he is self-consciously metaphorical here; he prefaces his deduction that "our prayers are granted" with the warning, "it is plain there is a sense in which this is not true" (YES, 4). He is not necessarily disparaging prayer in a more conventional sense. In a later sermon prayer is treated for the most part conservatively as "petition" (S, 86.5).[7] But the figurative meaning of this sense was the truer for him, and after 1831 he came back to his bolder definition (JMN, III, 307-308), which is later used in "Self-Reliance" (CW, II, 77). At the same time, however, he did not cease to recommend the ritual of prayer if practiced in the proper spirit. In a Fast Day sermon preached four times between 1832 and 1836, he says that prayer, fasting, and humiliation, are mere forms, "yet all represent and cover things" (S, 150.2v). He then goes on to describe the spirit in which they should be carried out, stressing, as we might expect, that "the right prayer is the habitual reference of the Soul to God . . ." (S, 150.9v).

Emerson, then, considers prayer to be of potential value as a form, but tends more to use the word very freely to signify a spiritual attitude, which we can associate with "prayer" only by making an adjustment in our mind and considering the subject from his special point of view. This is the same kind of dislocation upon which an Emerson essay often depends. "Prudence" is a good example. We all know what prudence is, but the chances are that our notion is of a "base prudence" and not the "true prudence" which Emerson defines as "the outmost action of the inward life" (CW, II, 222): the regulating of the senses in the service of something higher.[8] Prudence is redefined by the same principle as prayer, the main difference between the two examples--apart from greater maturity of expression in the Essays--being Emerson's deliberate caginess in the way he hides his assumptions behind a disarming exordium.

Emerson's discussions of miracles present a more complex problem than his comments on prayer, partly because his treatment of the subject was somewhat influenced by the importance attached to it by most Unitarians, for whom miracles were the chief evidence of the authority of scripture. His earlier and later pronouncements on the subject at first seem flatly contradictory. As is well-known, he denounced the doctrine of miracles as "monster" in "The Divinity School Address" (CW, I, 129), whereas five years before, he had written a sermon which implies if not professes a belief in historical miracles, though in a tone rather perfunctory and unenthusiastic (YES, 125-126). Nevertheless, the difference between these two positions is not so great as it might seem,[9] and his method of interpretation is indeed the same as in the case of prayer. Throughout the sermons, Emerson's prevailing attitude toward the evidences of revelation is simply that "the whole credit of the N.T. lies in the unexampled force of its address to the conscience," (S, 92, 4v); the first journal note for the Miracles sermon in fact begins, "Internal evidence outweighs all other to the inner man" (JMN, III, 214; YES, 124). This is really the main point of the sermon. Emerson's grudging acceptance of miracles is phrased, "Since I perceive the divine truth of the doctrine, I know the miracle was wrought which they said was wrought" (YES, 125).[10] The careful reader will see that Emerson is trying to alter the definition of "miracle" in this sermon so as to be able to affirm "all our life is a miracle" (YES, 122). Less than two months later, in the impressive sermon "The Holy Spirit," he devotes a section to miracles to illustrate the point that the Holy Spirit is simply a personification of the spiritual influences that regularly operate through man. In this section, "miracles" is used in a metaphorical sense (S, 110.12) as Emerson reaffirms that "the evidence of [historical] miracles I look upon as altogether secondary to that of the Conscience" (S, 110.8v). "I suppose miraculous power is only more power not different power," he asserts (110.10v) and this "democratic" view of miracles becomes the subject for a later sermon (no. 169) and the basis for his view in "The Divinity School Address." Again, the justification for this view is the assumption of God's immanence in the soul, and again Emerson retains the terms of doctrine to express his idea.

Emerson's approach to other ecclesiastical subjects is much the same. Like other Unitarian clergymen like Channing, he is in reaction against what he called the "materialism of the Calvinists" (S, 43.1v), the literal interpretation of that which should be taken figuratively. A remark from Emerson's next to last sermon (1835) summarizes the general principle of his exegesis: "In the scriptures generally what is said to be above is understood as that which is within" (S, 170.5v). Emerson consistently objects to the "carnal" imagery of the apocalypse (S, 93.4v). Heaven, he asserts, "is not a place, but a state of the mind. Hell is a vice, the rebellion of the passions, the army of cares, the night of self-made ignorance, the stings of self accusation. Heaven is the well ordered informed benevolent self devoted mind when it adopts God's will for its own" (S, 37B.5-5v). In keeping with his later saying "eternity is now," Emerson sees salvation and the judgment not so much as future events as processes continually being enacted in the soul (S, 139.16-16v). Christ himself, Emerson notes, "is continually spoken of in the Epistles almost as an abstract name for those virtues that shone in him" (S, 123.12v). Finally, in a sermon to which McGiffert has given the intriguing title, "God's wrath and man's sin," Emerson argues that the picture of a wrathful God in the Old Testament was merely a barbarous personification by Hebrew poets, and that only a sense of guilt makes man attribute wrath to God (S, 89.3-4v). Divine wrath, therefore, Emerson defines as "the sufferings of man" (S, 89.7).

But while Emerson's characteristic treatment of forms and doctrines in the sermons is an effort to pierce through for the characteristics they symbolize, he will also discuss them more tolerantly, as the possible embodiments of spirit, as the case of prayer shows. The same position which makes him indifferent to dogma and hostile to sciolism gives him a ready tolerance of all dogma held in the proper spirit. The wise man, he says in one sermon, "looks upon the Catholic or the Methodist or the Friends' or the New Jerusalem Church as one manifestation more of the desires & opinions of the human mind . . . based at last on the moral nature" (S, 111.2). If his redefinition of prayer predicted "Self-Reliance," then this is the beginning of "History." Revivals of religion and the odd-sounding doctrines of various sects both can be traced back to the constitution of the mind-- which Emerson here identifies with the law of the Lord-- and, if practiced sincerely, are entitled to respect if not to imitation.

In many of the sermons Emerson seems concerned with showing a basis in nature for Calvinist principles. "All the errors of Calvinism are exaggerations only & may generally be traced directly to some spiritual truth from which they spring." (JMN, III, 225). Emerson had declared as early as 1829 that there is "the firmest foundation in nature for the doctrine of Election--not surely in the absurd way in which that doctrine has been taught, but for the sentiment out of which it doubtless grew--the sense that God doth love one, & doth not love another of his children." (S, 35A.9). The best example of Emerson's respect for the natural meaning of Calvinism is the sermon "Liberalism and Rigidity," where he plays the two sects off against each other. Like the essay "Politics," which it strongly predicts, this sermon takes the view that conservative and liberal parties are founded in nature and are similarly true and incomplete. The later essay is more expansive in projecting a perfect situation where the conservative respect for property has become unnecessary, whereas the sermon does not see a resolution between the two parties, but both recommend rising above mere partisanship (YES, 88-89).

On the whole, Emerson mentions Calvinism in his sermons less often to attack it than to admonish his congregation that it would be better to be a good Calvinist than to "hug our vices under the name of liberal Christianity" (S, 43.lv). His attitude toward all sects became more and more pronounced from 1829 on, until it seemed to him that different religions were practically equivalent. "To be at perfect agreement with a man of most opposite conclusions," he wrote in 1832, "you have only to translate your language into his. The same thought which you call God in his nomenclature is called Christ. In the language of William Penn moral sentiment is called Christ" (JMN, IV, 14). Two years later, he listened to a Calvinist minister with admiration, "because though the whole is literally false, it is really true; only he speaks Parables which I translate as he goes. Thus, he says, 'the carnal mind hates God continually': & I say, 'It is the instinct of the understanding to contradict the reason.' One phrase translated the other" (JMN, IV, 319-320).[12]

Emerson's growing sense of the intertranslateability of creeds is vital to his later thought. His sermon remarks on Calvinism are the first examples of his idea of metonymy--everything is convertible into everything else. In fact, this conversion was often essential to make a point. As he puts it in 1838,

> . . . in order to present the bare idea of virtue, it is necessary that we should go quite out of our circumstance and custom, else it will be instantly confounded with the poor decency and inanition, the poor ghost that wears its name in good society. Therefore it is that we fly to the pagans and use the name and relations of Socrates, of Confucius, Manu, Zoraster; not that these are better or as good as Jesus and Paul (for they have not uttered so deep moralities), but because they are good algebraic terms, not liable to confusion of thought like those we habitually use.
> (J, V, 81-82)

The frequency and the success with which Emerson came to do this has made F. I. Carpenter call him "probably the founder of the modern school of Comparative Religion in America";[13] however, the same catholicity is foreshadowed in Disciple and Examiner articles on the religions of other cultures.

But the tendency in Emerson's sermons to reduce the letter to the spirit and find an equivalence in all faiths is always resisted by the fact that he is still preaching the gospel, still making use of traditional rhetoric. The change in Emerson which the 1829-1831 journals reveal is much harder to trace in the sermons, largely because his terms are ambiguous. We have seen this in Chapter One, in the language of the poem "A dull uncertain brain."[14] To take another example, here is the conclusion to "Self-Culture:"

> . . . let us present ourselves to God, let us not be conformed to this world, but be transformed into the likeness of the eternal world. Here on earth let us keep the laws and observe the customs and think the thoughts, and speak the language of Heaven, and God shall administer every aid, and shall make us pass with joy from this present world to the world of spirits.
>
> (YES, 104)

How is this passage to be read? Is God within or without? Where is heaven? If it is within, why does Emerson say "on earth"? The rest of the sermon suggests the answers to these questions, but Emerson's language creates the same problems of interpretation, from "Pray without Ceasing" down through "Astronomy." There are also passages where he clearly evinces a distrust of his own liberalism. For instance, a sermon on the Sabbath--the one religious institution Emerson continued to value (CW, I, 151)--written less than two months before "Gnothi Seauton," contains this warning:

> It is a very dangerous symptom of a licentious thinking, when a man begins to refine to this excess as not only to undervalue outward forms, but to make them nothing. Those who would have the kingdom of heaven wholly within, have sometimes exhibited the kingdom of hell without.
>
> (S, 116.1)

In the end, it is often impossible to say where in the sermons Emerson is treating forms symbolically and where he is not, the reason being that his feelings and his motives were both mixed. As a minister he is still trying to reconcile revelation and the church with his conscience.

Now the problem of the sermons carries over into Emerson's later work. All abstract terms and the various vocabularies of Christianity, Platonism, Hinduism, etc., employed by Emerson are subject to redefintion in light of his faith in divine immanence and yet these terms give a certain definitive tone to the expression of this faith. Take the climax of "Thenody:"

What is excellent,
As God lives, is permanent;
Hearts are dust, hearts loves remain;
Heart's love will meet thee again.
(CW, IX, 157)

The language in these beautiful lines perhaps implies more consolation than it can actually give. Emerson has personified "Heart's love" and God, as well as the "deep heart" that tells this message to the poet in what is actually an interior monologue, so there is the suggestion that the poet will be reunited with the boy in the after-life. This idea of immortality is a far cry from Emerson's characteristic view of immortality, as in "The Sovereignty of Ethics:" "Other world! there is no other world. God is one and omnipresent; here or nowhere is the whole fact" (CW, X, 199). Of course the personifications here are only figures of speech and the idea is reconciled with the lecture passage by saying that the spiritual life is immortal (all that is excellent is permanent), but the tone of the poem, which makes the difference, is controlled by the personifications.

The most significant change in the whole development of Emerson's mature thought may be interpreted as a tonal shift of this kind. What was "nature" in Emerson's early writing becomes "fate" by *Conduct of Life*.[15] Spirit is still seen as dominating matter; the distinction between me and not-me is the same; but in the shift of terms we sense how much harder Emerson now considers it for the individual to dominate his environment. In *Nature*, the idea was "Build therefore your own world" (CW, I, 76); in "The Poet," it was still "The soul makes the body" (CW, III, 14); in "Fate," it is "Every spirit makes its house; but afterwards the house confines the spirit" (CW, VI, 9). A particular manifestation of Emerson's "decline" into fatalism has been noted in Emerson's developing idea of the creative process. His use of the neoplatonic vocabulary to stress the spontaneity which was inherent from the first in his idea is a change more apparent than real, yet real.

The chief developments in the interplay between surface and meaning from the sermons to the essays are in artfulness and assurance. In the sermons, Emerson's intent is to enlighten, in the essays it is to provoke. "I say to a thoroughly good man, if such an one there were, *It is only so far as you find Christianity within your own soul* that I recommend it," he says in one sermon (S, 88.7). The later Emerson would have omitted the preamble. Again, Sermon 141 starts from the interesting text, "Do thyself no harm."[16] Emerson develops his subject deliberately. "Every commandment of religion truly considered," he begins, "is not so much God commanding ~~man~~ as it is a higher part of man contending against a lower part;" therefore heaven, hell, judgment, and the knowledge of all truth are contained within us" (S, 141.1v). It follows from this that nothing can harm a virtuous mind because we only can hurt ourselves; that our actions shall judge us and that fortune cannot affect us; that external evil is apparent and not real. On theother hand, from this also follows our responsibility: to do ourselves no harm.

Now suppose Emerson had begun this sermon by saying, "You cannot harm yourself." The point would not necessarily be different (it would hinge on the meaning of "yourself"), but the discourse would be much more provocative. This, in effect, is what is done in "Spiritual Laws," that most Emersonian of Emerson essays. "When the act of reflection takes place in the mind, when we look at ourselves in the light of thought, we discover that our life is embosomed in beauty." There is a deliberate rashness in this claim which surprises and perhaps affronts, and tends to make us overlook the qualifying clauses preceding it, which are too vague to stick.[17] "The soul will not know either deformity or pain," Emerson goes on to say. Original sin, predestination, and so forth, "the soul's mumps and measles and whooping coughs"--"These never presented a practical difficulty to any man . . . who did not go out of his way to seek them" (CW, II, 131-132). Surely Emerson is burying his head in the sand. For the first nine pages the hasty reader is confused and (if a twentieth century reader) somewhat repelled by the repeated counsel of obedience and acquiescence, carried on in the most rambling manner with generalizations piled upon each other, supported, it seems, by the worst kind of cosmic optimism, until Emerson says that the spiritual laws are within oneself and that "do not choose" means something more difficult: to make only "a whole act of the man." He then proceeds to the main topic of the essay, vocation--another subject which he treated methodically in an early sermon.[18] The optimism expressed thus far is really grounded on the law that a man has "a calling in his character" (CW, II, 140). This justifies the acquiescence from one point of view for it suggests that all we have to do is listen, but on the other hand it strictly demands that we answer. Emerson's conclusion expresses this doubleness very well: "Be, and not seem. Let us acquiesce. . ." (CW, II, 160). Be firm, be easy. Reread the essay and many of the parts that before seemed naive now seem subtle and profoundly true.

There is a difference between the sermon and the essay, of course, but it is not in the equation which permits Emerson to deny the possibility of evil; it is in the confidence with which the language of reason is tacitly allowed to replace the language of the understanding in expressing this equation. For example, in "Spiritual Laws," Emerson says a little consideration would show us "that our painful labors are unnecessary and fruitless; that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine" (CW, II, 138). This means, literally, loaf and act only on impulse. Obviously that is, and is not, Emerson's meaning. He has described a way of action from the highest motives only, yet he is earnest in saying that ease and spontaneity characterize such action. "I hope it is somewhat better than whim at last, but we cannot spend the day in explanation," he says brusquely in a similar situation in "Self-Reliance" (CW, II, 51-52). The relation between the surface and the significance is the same as Kierkegaard describes in Fear and Trembling: if the voice that told Abraham to sacrifice his son was from below, then he is a criminal or a madman; since it was from above, he is a saint. But the outward appearance is the same.

In the sermons, Emerson is forced to explain, to use the language of the understanding. Thus in a sermon which follows the order of "Self-Reliance" by first asserting individuality then qualifying it by insisting that "whilst you trust in self--the origin of self must be perceived" (S, 123.8), he lets the cat out of the bag at once by explaining the paradox in the introduction. Nevertheless, this sermon is still an exercise in working on two levels, and in other cases, such as prayer and especially miracles, where the "lower" level is an arbitrary form or dogma which Emerson cannot belittle as much as he might like, he is stimulated to a considerable degree of artfulness--though not so much in his language as in his general handling of the subject.

In some ways, Emerson comes closest to the essays in those sermons which are not directly about forms or matters of faith but which try to apply religious truth to common experience, to make a point about either or both. For instance, wealth is used to illustrate the doctrine of compensation in Sermon 4. Emerson's argument is that wealth enriches us materially but if pursued to excess impoverishes, since ultimately a man will be ruined by dishonest dealing, bringing retribution. In the essay on "Wealth," Emerson more broadmindedly affirms the moral benefits of wealth in addition to the material, but his affirmations are again based on the principle of compensation: "The value of a dollar is, to buy just things; a dollar goes on increasing in value with all the genius and all the virtues of the world" (CW, VI, 103). As with "Spiritual Laws," the essay is more complex and also more naive-seeming than the sermon, because of Emerson's bold affirmation of the moral benefits of wealth.

Another type of sermon which suggests Emerson's later treatment of mundane topics is that group in which he considers apparently minor matters as having greater moral significance. In Sermon 134, "Words Are Things," Emerson emphasizes the connection between truth in conversation and truth of character, concluding that "in the best man there are no idle words but his words are things" (S, 134.13). The sermons on "Trifles," "Conversation," and "Gentleness" all find deeper meaning in a trivial subject. As Emerson says of the latter, it is not a quality of the first importance, but still a proper outward sign of the religious character (S, 33.2v, 7-8). Such sermons immediately suggest Emerson's treatment of essay subjects such as prudence, manners, and behavior, which are considered as the outward reaches of heroism, character, and culture, respectively, of importance when united to these greater qualities, but false when detached. The connection is emphasized in these three cases by Emerson's arrangement of the essays in pairs, reminiscent of the two-part organization of "Words Are Things."

The relative importance of common-life analogies to represent spiritual facts between the sermons and the essays, is best seen in the instance of friendship. In the sermons Emerson sometimes uses this analogy to suggest the proper relation between the soul and Christ, or even God himself. This basic idea is that Jesus is to us like an "elder brother" (S, 108.5), so that the love between us and Christ should be mutual and similar in kind. This friendship, he says, will increase as one's character grows purer (S, 62.3v), and is what leads us to keep God's commandments. These considerations are incorporated in an interesting sermon on "Friendship." Scripture, Emerson says, is full of examples of friendship, which are sanctioned "inasmuch as they have raised & refined the soul, & whatever refines the soul increases its capacity & its relish for friendship" (S, 140.1). Everyone desires to confide himself to a friend, and the better the man the better the friend he will be. Consequently, "nothing less than the All Perfect Mind can supply the cravings of man; . . . God is the Friend, whom always we seek . . ." (S, 140.11).

Now consider Emerson's homiletical treatment of friendship in relation to the later essay. Of course both are rife with suggestions about Emerson's inadequacies in this department, and yet if the essay is read as a sermon Emerson does not come out so badly. Here he is using a staple device in contrasting actual friends with an ideal friendship. If the exclamation, "I cannot deny it, O friend, that the vast shadow of the Phenomenal includes thee also" (CW, II, 197), sounds cruel and ludicrous it is partly because we fail to make the customary adjustment and realize that Emerson is measuring the friend on an idea standard, as "the child of all my foregoing hours, the prophet of those to come, and the harbinger of a greater friend" (CW, II, 214). By this ideal standard of course actual friendship fails, and it is easy to admit Emerson's argument, even the queer letter to the prospective friend (CW, II, 198). Indeed, his usual candor at times when he admits the discrepancy between ideal and actual seems to me especially striking in this essay, because it appeals to a side of his reader's experience doubtless true--for everyone who has undergone the vicissitudes of friendship--but not pleasant to admit. It seems particularly strange that academic minds, supposedly extrasensitive, have not done justice to this aspect of "Friendship."

However, the essay, after all, is not supposed to be a sermon. The sermon on friendship, like those on wealth, conversation, gentleness, and the other examples mentioned, uses the topic more or less opportunistically as a field in which to moralize, while the essay tries to draw the moral out of a discussion of the topic for its own sake. As essayist, Emerson is more a social commentator. In both cases, to be sure, he is still more interested in the law than in the thing itself. "General ideas are essences. They are our gods: they round and ennoble the most partial and sordid way of living," he says like a good platonist in "Nominalist and Realist" (CW, III, 231).

This is perhaps the way Emerson himself most desires to be read. Yet the sermons on practical topics lack the complex point of view that the essays, especially the later ones, in fact exhibit. The sermons, for obvious reasons, do not really entertain an attitude toward experience on the purely practical level. It is formula, not feeling, in such homilies as "Change and Permanence" (S, 6), to say that on one level phenomena have no meaning and on another they do. But in the essay on "Friendship," we sense that more is going on than in the sermon, that the essay is as much about experience as moral law, as much about the failure of actual friendships as it is a portrait of the ideal friend.

It is not so much in those sermons which seem to deal with common experience, therefore, that we find the closest parallel to the essays, as in the ones about matters of faith, and especially those which must struggle in order to reconcile what Emerson wants to affirm with the framework within which he must affirm it. For when he rejected a revelation based on the Bible for one based on nature, he still had to deal with the same problem: how to fit the external evidence to the testimony of his mind and heart, how to deal with the discrepancy between reason and understanding. The Unitarian divine trying to make revelation agreeable to the understanding, and the transcendentalist celebrating the relation of nature to spirit are roughly similar. Both recognize that the facts are not to be taken literally, that reason is to interpret them, yet both admit that this faculty is also limited in the individual and so the reconciliation must finally be imperfect or a matter of faith. Moreover, the Unitarian tends to slide over into the transcendentalist. As Channing saw, "that unbounded spiritual energy which we call God, is conceived by us only through consciousness, through the knowledge of ourselves."[19] At least in Channing's thought, the reason is always in the process of becoming Reason, the more he entertains the idea of man's likeness to God.[20] Although it seems definitive to say that the Unitarians preserved the belief that revelation is supernatural and historical while the transcendentalists believed in a direct revelation and divine immanence and discounted historical religion, in practice it is often impossible to draw the line between them. "Reason alone makes us capable of receiving a revelation," Channing wrote in "Christianity a Rational Religion," whose sweeping definition of "reason" worried his more conservative reviewer, Orville Dewey; though Channing ostensibly defined reason as merely "corresponding" to "the unity of God and the universe," not as participating in that unity, he could and did assert its superiority to revelation in this address.[21]

For these general reasons, and from the analysis of Emerson's sermons above, it would appear that Emerson's later way of treating the subjects of divine immanence and man's relation to nature, despite his debt to Coleridge and other catalysts native and European, can most usefully be regarded as an outgrowth of Unitarian thought, Channing's in particular. This stream of thought tended not only to encourage the cultivation of art in a general way, but also the particular conception of literary style which is characteristic of the idea of correspondence: that is, making the outer world a symbol of the inner. The chief reason for this resemblance is that the Unitarian view of reason led to a metaphorical interpretation of the inherited body of religion; in Channing and in Emerson's sermons, where the powers of the reason are broadly conceived, it plays a philosophical and rhetorical role analogous to the transcendental "me," and religious doctrine plays a role analogous to the "not-me."

The fact that the Unitarian view of human nature made for an approach to organized religion which predicts Emerson's later idea of natural style is of considerable importance. It shows that Emerson's style and theory of style evolved from factors in his own religious background, and that this evolution is directed by Emerson's idea of man's relation to God, the chief factor determining both the intellectual content of his sermons and essays and his later theory of correspondential style. It shows, in short, that Emerson's development as a stylist and critic of style, as well as a religious thinker, was organic and not to be explained primarily in terms of European influence.

ii

In a discourse given at the dedication of Harvard's Divinity Hall in 1826, Dr. Channing told his audience, "the best teacher is he who awakens in his pupils the power of thought, and aids them to go alone."[22] This is what endeared Samuel Hopkins the Edwardsian to Channing, Channing to Emerson and other transcendentalists, and Emerson to many, including John Dewey, whose influence on education has been in good part responsible for the truistical sound of Channing's remark today.[23] This is also the proper sense in which Emerson was a preacher, as opposed to the misleading notion, now happily dying or dead, that he was primarily trying to teach a set of philosophical doctrines. Emerson certainly was trying to teach something, his doctrine of the soul, but the nature of this idea made it impossible to formulate, for it could only be taught truly by suggesting and awakening in the reader a sense of the limitless possibilities of his own self.[24]

If we look at Emerson as a preacher in this sense, much of the preconceptions we may entertain *a priori* about a writer who subordinates literature to moral ends must disappear. For communication of the ulterior purpose as Emerson conceived it can only be accomplished through art; and Emerson was by temperament and talent an artist. Indeed, we might almost agree with Bronson Alcott, that Emerson sought the beauty of truth rather than truth itself, while he, Alcott, was more purely a seeker of truth alone, and that therefore he was primarily the teacher and Emerson the literary artist.[25]

But just as Emerson's apparent blindness to the realities of craftsmanship when he emphasizes the importance of inspiration must not betray us into caricaturing him as another Alcott, neither should his talents and sensibility mislead us into considering him too exclusively as a stylist, another Tennyson. For Emerson, "there is higher work for Art than the arts . . . . Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end" (*CW*, II, 363). "He is the true Orpheus who writes his ode, not with syllables, but men" (*CW*, VIII, 66). In 1837, he warned the seniors at Dartmouth that a great mistake of literary men is to use "the organ of language,--the subtlest, strongest, and longest-lived of man's creations, and only fitly used as the weapon of thought and of justice,--" in play, to "rob it of its almightiness by failing to work with it" (CW, I, 176-177). His most withering criticism of contemporary British poets in English Traits was that "the English have lost sight of the fact that poetry exists to speak the spiritual law, and that no wealth of description or of fancy is yet essentially new and out of the limits of prose, until this condition is reached" (CW, V, 256).

Among the journal notes for this chapter is the comment, "I find or fancy more true poetry, the love of the vast in the Welsh and Bardic fragments of Taliessen and his school, than in a good many volumes of British Classics" (J, VIII, 361). The model for the poet to which he gives chief emphasis in "Poetry and Imagination" is the antique bard who, like Merlin and Taliessen, was also a lawgiver to his race.[26] "Bring us the bards," he cried,

> who shall sing all our old ideas out of our heads, and new ones in; men-making poets; poetry which, like the verses inscribed on Balder's columns in Breidablik, is capable of restoring the dead to life . . .
> (CW, VIII, 64)

The union of the prophet and the poet, as we have seen, is held up as an ideal in "The Divinity School Address;" and Emerson saw it in the great English poets, Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth, and (sometimes) Shakespeare (EL, I, 274-276; CW, VIII, 202). He stressed the social duty of the scholar and the poet; and when he became disenchanted with action in the practical sense of reform, he insisted all the more that "words are also actions" (CW, III, 8). A crucial element in his portrait of the poet is representativeness. The concerns of men of genius are not different from those of the ordinary person; "they are more himself than he is." The poet "is isolated among his contemporaries by truth and by his art, but with this consolation in his pursuits, that they will draw all men sooner or later. For all men live by truth and stand in need of expression" (CW, III, 5). Though Emerson exhorts the young poet at the end of this essay, "thou shalt leave the world, and know the muse only" (CW, III, 41), he is entitled to this privilege only because the solitary life is the best way for him to fulfill his mission to mankind.

Emerson's commitment to art as a means of social instruction in the high sense is best seen in his love of eloquence and his own cultivation of the art. The collected bulk of his commentary on the orators he admired for one reason or another, Everett, Channing, Webster, Edward Taylor and Wendell Phillips, shows the fascination these men held for him, and early in life he resolved to become one himself. He pinned much of his hopes for success in the ministry on his own potential as a peaker (JMN, II, 239-240). In his third sermon, he was already sharing his dream with the congregation: "Suppose . . . an eloquence which I would to God were mine had moved the spirits of this congregation and had awakened their imagination . . . . to a discernment of the prodigious effect they were capable of producing"--"a new epoch would open in our history. Men would be enamoured of the beauty of virtue" (S, 3.8, 8v). When he had come to realize the limitations of the sermon and sensed the possibilities of the lecture, he maintained even more strongly the dream of a "perfect eloquence," where "the hearer would lose the sense of dualism, of hearing from another; would cease to distinguish between the orator and himself; would have the sense only of high activity and progress" (J, V, 21). "When the true man is born who shall do what we dream," he wrote to his brother William, "we shall then have an end to the fame of Demosthenes & Cicero.

"As it is," he concluded, "they seem yet to have a reprieve for the current year" (L, II, 460). He himself was disappointed at not living up to his dream (J, V, 373-374), yet to some of his contemporaries, such as Lowell, Emerson the lecturer was in some ways a more striking figure than Emerson the writer.[27] Alcott, impressed by an 1837 lecture on religion, went away assured that "Emerson is destined to be the high literary name of this age," and in 1856 reflected, with pardonable exaggeration, "The Lyceums are properly Emersonia . . . . There was no lecture till Emerson made it."[28]

It is not hard to see why a man holding Emerson's views of art's ultimate end would so prize the art of eloquence. It would be more than metaphorically true to say of the orator that "his speech is not to be distinguished from action" (CW, VIII, 115). Moreover, "Of all the musical instruments on which men play, a popular assembly is that which has the largest compass and variety, and out of which, by genius and study, the most wonderful effects can be drawn" (CW, VII, 62). Eloquence revives what poetry lost when the oral tradition died out, and goes beyond it when there is "a reinforcing of man from events" (CW, VII, 92), a crisis to serve as an opportunity for the orator, like the spiritual delinquency of the New England church or the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law.

Emerson's own writings are the crystallization of his eloquence. Most, in part or parcel, were originally lectures, and even among his earlier books such pieces as "Love," "Heroism," and "New England Reformers" are presented as essays almost as they were delivered. For this reason alone, more than most authors, Emerson must be conceived as directly addressing his reader, and beyond this, as directly exhorting the reader. For "the end of eloquence is--is it not?--to alter in a pair of hours, perhaps in a half hour's discourse, the convictions and habits of years" (CW, VII, 64). The didactic element cannot and should not be sublimated out of a consideration of Emerson's aesthetics, or the brilliance of his style is itself diminished. Consider for example the well-known sentence,

> There is for every man a statement possible of that truth which he is most unwilling to receive,--a statement possible, so broad and so pungent that he cannot get away from it, but must either bend to it or die of it.
> (CW, VII, 91-92)

This is excellently put. One could say that Emerson has here again fulfilled himself by expressing an idea which, if stated baldly, would surely be questioned--the idea that every man can be convinced by the truth against his will--in such a forceful way that we do not challenge it, at least not until the sentence has loosed its grip on us. The excellence, to be sure, depends upon the language and syntax used; stylistic analysis stops here. But the effect does not--the felt truth of what Emerson has said is the final and most important step in the reading. To content oneself with a reaction like "Oh, how beautifully expressed!" reduces the passage to a kind of aesthetic eunuchry. The unsexing is particularly obvious in the case of Emerson, but it can be done to almost any writer by taking a too literary approach to his art.

Much of Emerson's eloquence has disappeared in the printing, with the removal of the speaker's voice and the atmosphere of the lecture room. What Emerson often said about Channing was doubtless partly true of himself: "he could never be reported, for his eye and voice could not be printed, and his discourses lose their best in losing him" (CW, X, 339).

An obvious example is Emerson's speech on "Robert Burns," which seems to have had an extraordinary effect upon the listeners at the time,[29] but is rather flat and shallow in the reading. For example, Emerson says,

> Robert Burns, the poet of the middle class, represents in the mind of men to-day that great uprising of the middle class against the armed and privileged minorities, that uprising which worked politically in the American and French Revolutions, and which, not in governments so much as in education and social order, has changed the face of the world.
> (CW, XI, 440)

It is possible to imagine how this passage might have been spoken with effect, but today it reads like an except from an average political speech. Even the fine lines in the "Boston Hymn"

> Who is the owner? The slave is the owner,
> And ever was. Pay him.
> (CW, IX, 204)

though stirring, hardly bring the reader to his feet.[30] Emerson obviously realized the gap between the two media, for in most cases there is a considerable difference between the essays which merely transcribe lecture notes and those which have been especially prepared for publication. To put it most simply, the first can be read faster than the second. The expression in the written essays is more succinct and more is packed into each paragraph, whereas the spoken essays, though terse enough, seem thinner and more obvious if scrutinized too closely. This generalization, of course, does not always hold true; the earlier discourses included in the same volume as Nature are stronger than some of the later essays where Emerson has become rambling and diffuse. But the difference is sufficiently clear to show his recognition that prose eloquence is not the same as oratory.

The eloquence of Emerson's essays makes its appeal most often by means of the stylistic devices analyzed in the last chapter. However, these, as we saw, are not only elements of rhetoric to Emerson, but vehicles for expressing a view of nature. Such is the case also with that master strategy, traced in the first part of this chapter, which includes and directs the particular stylistic devices: the applying of the idea of the individual as God to every topic discussed. Emerson came closest to giving this intention a rhetorical name in his discussion of the superlative. He objects to the superlative, but what he has in mind is excess adjectives. He uses it himself throughout the lecture, tending to overstate the case on both sides, particularly the first. First he asserts, "Ever a low style is best" (CW, X, 168); later, that "the superlative is as good as the positive, if it be alive. If man loves the conditioned, he also loves the unconditioned" (171). Criticizing those who exaggerate, he says, "We talk, sometimes, with people whose conversation would lead you to suppose that they had lived in a museum, where all the objects were monsters and extremes. Their good people are phoenixes; their naughty are like the prophet's figs" (163). This, of course, is an exaggeration of his own. Litotes and hyperbole, as tropes and as points of view, are staple Emersonian devices for making a balanced statement. "I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall" (CW, II, 307). O. W. Firkins captures this side of Emerson in a parable:

> Three men may be discriminated: the man who makes reckless statements in good faith; the man who sees that reckless statements are partial, and, seeking universalism, becomes guarded; and the man who sees that guarded statements, likewise, are partial, and seek universalism in his turn, reverts to audacity. The third man was Emerson.[31]

"Speak the affirmative; emphasize your choice by utter ignoring of all that you reject; seeing that opinions are temporary, but convictions uniform and eternal," Emerson advises in "The Preacher" (CW, X, 235). This assertion, which lives up to itself, I take to be a principal method of his teaching, not to mention his sensibility, as shown by the endless aphorisms in the Journals.

The basis of the Emersonian superlative is, of course, his dualism. "Every thing is beautiful seen from the point of the intellect, or as truth. But all is sour if seen as experience" (CW, II, 171). Subjectivity, is either base or divine; there is no middle ground; at least not in the statement. Here is Emerson's transition in "Experience:"

We cannot say too little of our constitutional necessity of seeing things under private aspects, or saturated with our humors. And yet is the God the native of these bleak rocks. That need makes in morals the capital virtue of self-trust" (CW, III, 81). A balanced statement is made by a clash of opposites. But the teaching, that is to say the force, is not in the equivication but in the clash. To take another example from the same section:

> It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man.
> (CW, III, 75)

This is one of Emerson's finest thrusts in the whole essay, from its ellipsis and audacity. But it could also have gone the other way; he could also have called the discovery the salvation of man, as in effect he does in "Spiritual Laws" and "Self-Reliance." Really to understand him here we must bear this ambiguity in mind and weigh the assertion against its opposite, which makes it all the more provocative a statement of Emerson's idea of subjectivity. This is especially true of "Circles," one of his boldest essays. Omit one eleven-line paragraph and the rest of the essay, which it balances, loses its meaning. "Do not set the least value on what I do," Emerson says: "I am only an experimenter;" "I unsettle all things." Then he adds, "Yet this incessant movement and progression which all things partake could never become sensible to us but by contrast to some principle of fixture or stability in the soul . . . . That central life is somewhat superior to creation, superior to knowledge and thought, and contains all its circles" (CW, II, 318). On one level, "Circles" means only circularity or frustration; on another it means health, renewal, even progress. Emerson is only an experimenter, and his remark strikes home, but these experiments tell, when they are related to the central life. The alternatives pull against each other and the truth is in a reconciliation: any amount of experimentation is justified when it proceeds from the central life. Emerson drives this point home by building up to his conclusion by a series of progressively more audacious affirmations.

The general conclusion to which this view leads us is a familiar one: the paradoxical connection between the me and the not-me, applied to a given topic, is the basis of Emerson's style and teaching. The more ambitiously he exploits this paradox the more effective he is. That is not to say that Emerson is good only in such essays as "Experience" and "Fate," where he does most justice to the gloomier aspects of life; "Spiritual Laws" is as good if not better in its deliberate flouting of common sense.

To recognize dualism as the basis of Emerson's rhetorical method is to admit the inadequacy of all reportage such as this study has undertaken. In making generalizations about Emerson's theory of the creative process, for example, it is somewhat misleading to draw the mean between his professed admiration for genius and his practical respect for talent, because an equivocating statement is really foreign to his way of expression. Once the range of his mind has been suggested we must return to his own language, "All writing comes by the grace of God," and so on. Now that we sense what he means by such a statement, his meaning should not stay sundered from the way in which it is put. For within the limits of its expression, Emerson's own criticism is still worth more than most criticism which is made of it. "Pope wrote poetry fit to put round frosted cake," "Wordsworth was a bell with a wooden tongue"--these are oracular, not academic, but if we are content to ask of Emerson what he demanded of his books, the sweeping, dazzling aphorisms may seem the most effective way of teaching.

CONCLUSION

Emerson considered art as subservient to spiritual purpose. In his view of the creative process, true inspiration will necessarily produce effective expression and therefore genius is more essential to good writing than talent. Moreover, Emerson considered the work itself to be of value not for its own sake but for its impact upon an audience. Therefore we must consider his remarks about art as chiefly applicable to a sophisticated kind of preaching, where the aim of the writer or speaker, despite the subtlety and refinement of the expression, is primarily to communicate insights to the end of arousing the spirit of others.

But in Emerson's thought the religious and aesthetic aspects of "spirit" or "insight" cannot be separated. Goodness, beauty, and truth are bound up together. The spiritual impulse which finds its expression in art is also aesthetic, as is the response of the reader to the work. When Emerson borrowed the language of neoplatonism to describe the creative process as proceeding from a state of ectasy, in which the divine spirit dominated the passive artist, he somewhat obscured his conviction that the certificate of true inspiration is the effective embodiment of itself. Furthermore, to Emerson the style or manner of embodiment is itself significant of that which is expressed. The stylistic categories discussed in chapter three are also philosophical categories; Emerson's ideas about rhyme, language, composition, structure (ascending and antithetic) constitute both a program for literature and an outline of the natural law. When Emerson insisted that art must follow the method of nature, he was simultaneously endorsing a literary program, for the method of nature is translateable into stylistic terms.

Emerson's sense of art's importance can be summarized by saying that for him art has the same relation to its message that manners have to character, that beauty has to virtue or truth, that nature has to God. That is, the one is properly the outer face and symbol of the other. In Emerson's view, the surface by itself is empty and insignificant; external beauty "is the herald of inward and eternal beauty, and is not alone a solid and satisfactory good" (_CW_, I, 24). But beauty cannot be dispensed with any more than nature can. "In composition the _What_ is of no importance compared with the _How_. The most tedious of all discourses are on the subject of the Supreme Being" (_JMN_, V, 304-305). Emerson's balanced opinion is indicated by a journal quotation from Goethe which warns that "'Those who describe the inner without embodying it in an outward; or those who describe the outward without making the soul felt through it, are both on the last step from which we pass into common life'" (_JMN_, V, 143).

Many of Emerson's critical judgments of other writers can be explained in terms of this formula. Wordsworth is insufficiently outward, Tennyson too much so. Dante, at least in one of Emerson's remarks, is "at once the most outward & inward of bards" (_L_, IV, 197), as is Shakespeare, in Emerson's most characteristic judgment of him.

In his concern for art's relationship to spiritual purpose, Emerson was writing in an already established vein of American criticism. It is true that his leading critical concepts were, to a considerable degree, derived from other sources. Coleridge's idea of poetic genius and his distinction between genius and talent; Sampson Reed's religious conception of genius; and the neoplatonic tradition of the poet's divine madness all influenced Emerson's theory of the creative process. In addition, the idea of correspondence, from which his notions of literary style were largely deduced came to Emerson mostly *via* Coleridge. But it was Channing who really introduced as a principle to American criticism the idea that great art proceeds from man's likeness to God, and Emerson relied on this principle when he pictured the creative process as truly inspired and literary style as one aspect of the correspondence between nature and spirit.

The most definitive features of Emerson's literary theories, in other words, are based upon his view of human nature as divine. Channing and other Unitarian writers predict and approach his view; to the extent that they do, their aesthetic criticism tends to foreshadow Emerson's conceptions of the artist as inspired prophet and art and beauty as the legitimate, even the necessary, vehicles for communicating spirit.

Moreover, the neo-Arminian view of human nature makes for another, more specific parallel between Emerson's later theory of style and Unitarian discourse, as illustrated by Channing and by Emerson's sermons. Though Emerson's idea of the correspondence between nature and mind has no connection with the main concerns of Unitarianism, still Unitarianism tended to deal with doctrine in somewhat the same sort of style that the idea of correspondence encouraged. The articles of religion and the events and precepts of the Bible were interpreted symbolically, in the belief that Christianity and the moral reason of man should tally as symbol and referent. Here again, as views of human nature became higher, the authority of historical Christianity became more and more seen as dependent upon its reasonableness. Similarly, in Emerson's philosophy of nature, when human nature is assumed to be divine, nature becomes seen as subordinate to man, a symbolic mirror of his spirit. Channing's "Christianity a Rational Religion" and the last chapter of Emerson's Nature are examples of these analogous developments.

Unitarianism, then, was in some ways almost as intrinsically favorable to art as Emersonian transcendentalism. The difference is only in degree. In each case, both the religious and the aesthetic power lay in the conception of man's spiritual nature. Channing expressed this fact most forcibly in his "Remarks on National Literature." "Our chief hopes for an improved literature rest on our hopes of an improved religion," he asserts. "Man's relation to God is the great quickening truth, throwing all other truths into insignificance . . . . We look to it as the true life of the intellect."[1] This insight states the common and distinctive concern which links the writings of Channing, Emerson, and later Walt Whitman, aligning them as a kind of apostolic succession of prophet-critics, in whom a progressive application of the religious spirit to literature can be traced. In this succession, Emerson in some ways represents the golden mean. Half Unitarian divine and half professional poet, he was able to take advantage of his temperament, his training, and his age to reconcile religion and art with a cohesiveness perhaps unattainable today.

APPENDIX

A NOTE ON CHANNING'S INFLUENCE UPON EMERSON

The question of the degree of Dr. Channing's direct influence upon Emerson and his circle has often been debated.[1] Circumstantial evidence implies a strong influence on Emerson. Channing was the family pastor after 1811 and helped Emerson in his religious studies; the latter once said that he studied divinity for Channing's sake (L, I, 146). We have seen that young Emerson took him as a model of eloquence, quickly preferring him to Edward Everett (L, I, 138). Channing was "our Bishop" (CW, X, 576) to Emerson and the young clergymen of the movement party in the early '30s, and was invited to and discussed at meetings of the transcendental club. Later he was eulogized in a Dial obituary written by Emerson (Unc, 113) and finally sanctified as "the star of the American church" of his day in the "Historic Notes." "We could not then spare a single word he uttered in public," Emerson affirmed (CW, X, 339).

Yet it is significant that Emerson was writing Channing's intellectual obituary long before the doctor's death. In a letter of 1835 to Carlyle, Emerson defends Channing with this apology: "please love his catholocism that at his age can relish the Sartor, born and inveterated as he is in old books" (E-C, 119). This does not sound like the tone of discipleship. Two years later, Channing is pictured simply as a relic of the past: "Once Dr Channing filled our sky. Now we become so conscious of his limits & of the difficulty attending any effort to show him our point of view, that we doubt if it be worth while. Best amputate" (JMN, V, 329). At the same time as Emerson, Bronson Alcott, once similarly attracted to Channing, was experiencing the same disenchantment.[2]

Emerson's final assessment was of course much kinder than this. He continued to respect Channing as an individual, though for his moral sentiment rather than his intellectual ability, and as the leader of the previous generation, though limited by the narrowness of a time Emerson considered less enlightened than his own (J, VI, 105-106, 271, 284-285, 501).[3] He did not attach any permanent importance to Channing's works, though he praised "Milton" and "Napoleon" for their timely effect (CW, X, 339). As early as 1835 he had decided that Channing "possesses the mysterious endowment of natural eloquence, whose effect, however intense, is limited, of course, to personal communication. I can see myself that his writings, without his voice, may be meagre and feeble" (E-C, 119).

It seems fair to conclude that Channing spoke strongly to Emerson before 1832 but that afterwards the younger man outgrew him, as did Alcott, partly as a result of other influences which the drift of Channing's ideas had tended to encourage, Coleridge being one. The continuity in ideas between the works of Channing and the later Emerson is probably not so much a matter of direct influence as the response of two liberal and sensitive minds sharing a common religious tradition to the climate of opinion in successive decades. Yet Channing, it is clear, was in great part responsible for liberalizing that tradition far beyond what it had been in 1800, when he had begun his career, or even in 1812, when Buckminster and Emerson's father had just died. In this sense, Channing was an important influence upon Emerson. Furthermore, during the '20s Channing was indisputably an exciting figure to the younger generation. When the movement he had championed was carried further than what he had in mind, naturally there was mutual tension between himself and it, with the result that he was both venerated and disposed of by Emerson, Alcott and even Theodore Parker,[4] and had no direct influence whatsoever upon the younger men who were inspired by Emerson, such as Thoreau and Whitman. These, in turn, went through the same cycle as Emerson had. For a time they felt for Emerson almost a disciple's reverence but soon developed independently, so that they could at last look back upon him with the same mixed feelings as Emerson later had for Channing. In all these cases, the connection is easily exaggerated and endlessly debatable, but the older man clearly had a quickening and inspirational effect upon the younger.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. *The American Transcendentalists* (New York, 1957), pp. 196-219.

2. For a discussion of *Dial* criticism, which shows its thoroughly Emersonian cast, see Helen Hennessy, "The *Dial*: Its Poetry and Poetic Criticism," *NEQ*, XXXI (1958), 66-87.

3. See especially F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (London, New York, Toronto, 1941), pp. 24-44, 64-70 *passim*; Charles Feidelson, "Toward Melville: Some Versions of Emerson," *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 119-124, 134-135, 142-150; Rene Wellek, "Emerson's Literary Theory and Criticism," *Worte und Werte*, ed. Gustav Erdmann and Alfons Eichstaedt (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1961), 444-456.

4. "From Edwards to Emerson," *NEQ*, XIII (1940), 589-617. In a preface to the article as reprinted in *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York, 1956), p. 184, Miller complains that his article "has been unhappily construed by many readers . . . as meaning that in some mystical pretension I argue for a direct line of intellectual descent." I do not attempt to construe it here, only to point out that Miller oversimplifies the difference and overemphasizes the resemblance between Emerson and Edwards.

CHAPTER I

1. Among biographical and critical discussions of the period in Emerson's life up until 1833, I am indebted chiefly to Stephen E. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate* (New York, 1961), pp. 3-27, and Ralph L. Rusk, *The Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, pp. 32-166 *passim*. For Emerson's problem of vocation see especially Whicher, and Henry Nash Smith, "Emerson's Problem of Vocation," *NEQ*, XII (1939), 52-69, reprinted in Konvitz and Whicher, pp. 60-71. There is no dependable study specifically on the topic of Emerson's changing attitude toward literature.

2. Josiah Quincy, quoted in Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Ralph Waldo Emerson, Holmes's Writings* (Cambridge, Mass., 1892), XIV, 35.

3. The early epic is "The History of Fortus," in Emerson and William Henry Furness, Records of a Lifelong Friendship 1807-1882, ed. Horace Howard Furness (Boston and New York, 1910, pp. 178-185. See also Emerson's Indian Superstition, ed. Kenneth W. Cameron (Hanover, N.H., 1954); and Tremaine McDowell, "A Freshman Poem by Emerson," PMLA, XLV (1930), 326-329, as well as JMN, I, II passim for other early journal verse. Edward Everett Hale, ed., Two Unpublished Essays (Boston and New York, 1896) reprints Emerson's Bowdoin Prize Essays.

4. An excellent introduction to this magazine and the period as a whole is provided by the commentary and texts in Lewis P. Simpson, ed., The Federalist Literary Mind: Selections from The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review, 1803-1811 . . . (Louisiana State University Press, 1962).

5. Byron in particular fascinated Emerson, though he was piously shocked by his immorality (J, II, 4-5). In 1818, Emerson declared the third canto of Childe Harold the most beautiful poetry he had ever read (L, I, 55). For his opinion of Scott, see John T. Flanagan, "Emerson as a Critic of Fiction," PQ, XV (1936), 31-34.

6. The most thorough study yet published of Emerson's development as a poet is Edith Mettke, Der Dichter Ralph Waldo Emerson: Mystiches Denken und poetischer Ausdruck (Heidelberg, 1963); see pp. 37-64 for discussion of Emerson's development up to 1832. Mettke's study, however, relies heavily on Strauch's dissertation, which, if ever published, will supersede it.

7. See JMN, I, 65-66, 109, 139-141, 287-291, 295-299; II, 8-9, 23-24.

8. Rusk, p. 64.

9. Robert Falk, "Emerson and Shakespeare," PMLA, LVI (1941), 532-543, and other critics have pointed out that Emerson's final criticism of Shakespeare in Representative Men (CW, IV, 216-219) is atypical of the majority of his remarks and is designed to fit the plan of that book, which tries to make a strong statement of the flaws in each person discussed. But once this is understood, it remains that Emerson could not feel so warmly toward Shakespeare the man as he could toward, say, Milton or George Herbert, and that this colored his criticism.

10. Op. cit., p. 5.

11. Ironically, this is the first poem in which Edith Mettke detects an influence from romanticism, p. 49.

12. See especially JMN, IV, 30, and the letter of resignation to his parish (L, I, 355-357). I think Rusk is unfair in his analysis

of Emerson's motives during this period, as when he says that early in 1832 Emerson "began to consider seriously whether he could not really cut and run without too much loss of dignity" (p. 160).

13. Actually, much of the censure of Wordsworth in the early journals is not so much a product of Emerson's early neoclassicism, as critics have sometimes maintained, as it is an objection to the poet's dulness; indeed, Emerson maintained this objection throughout his life. (See pp. 62-63 below). However, it is true that Emerson's enthusiastic recognition of Wordsworth's good qualities seems not to have come until about the same time as the revolution in his thought as a whole (1831). For the first such notice of the poet, see JMN, III, 305-307.

14. See pp. 30-31 below for a discussion of Channing's essay.

15. Recorded in (a transcript of ?) her diary, MME IV, p. 199; the entry is dated January 28, 1822. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

16. This and other entries of the same period are the basis of Emerson's sermon 110, "The Holy Spirit," given March 20, 1831 (YES, 268). For a discussion of the idea of inspiration in this sermon, see pp. 45-46 below.

    It should be pointed out that Emerson's and Channing's assertions about Milton's divine inspiration were not strikingly new even for the time they were made. According to George Sensabaugh, Milton in Early America (Princeton, 1964), as early as 1808 a Mrs. Anne MacVear Grant wrote that she "'had not the smallest doubt of [Milton's] being as much inspired as ever Isaiah was'" (p. 12). The important part of Emerson's comment, as well as Channing's, is that the operations of the Holy Spirit should be universalized. Milton is an obvious literary example but not a special case.

17. "Gnothi Seauton" is printed in JMN, III, 290-294, and printed and fully annotated in Kenneth W. Cameron, Emerson the Essayist (Raleigh, N.C., 1945), I, 175-179.

18. Of the several variations between the journal text and the version in CW, IX, 389-390, the most significant is the omission of a period after line 5, making the sense clearer than in the Centenary version.

19. For more commentary on Emerson's ambiguous use of traditional rhetoric see pp. 126-127 below and chapter 4, passim.

20. A rather sad twist to Emerson's idea in the poem is given by a sentence written below it and later struck out: "Why can I not write verses" (JMN, III, 295).

21. Emerson's publications during the 1820's include: "Thoughts on the Religion of the Middle Ages," CD, X (1822), 401-408; a favorable review of F.W.P. Greenwood's Hymnal, "A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for Christian Worship," C Ex, X (1831), 30-34; and some short pieces in prose and verse, including the poem "Fame," in a gift book, The Offering for 1829. The latter are reprinted in Ralph Thompson, "Emerson and the Offering for 1829," AL, VI (1934), 151-157; the review is reprinted in Kenneth W. Cameron, "An Early Prose Work of Emerson," AL, XXII (1950), 332-338, and is discussed in fn. 35 of this chapter. The first article is a pious, narrow-minded piece of moralizing that is best forgotten.

22. Whicher, p. 76 and passim. To trace this development is one of the main purposes of Whicher's book.

23. "Emerson's Problem of Vocation," Konvitz and Whicher, pp. 62, 70.

24. See Carl F. Strauch, "The Year of Emerson's Poetic Maturity: 1834," PQ, XXXIV (1955), 353-356 and passim.

25. Democratic Vistas, Prose Works 1892, ed., Floyd Storall (New York University Press, 1964), II, 365. I must confess having pilfered this motto from Charles Metzger, who uses it several times.

26. Octavius Brooks Frothingham, Transcendentalism in New England: A History (New York, 1959), p. 134.

27. As William R. Hutchison explains, though the "nominal center" of the Unitarian movement was the rejection of the doctrine of the trinity, the "practical source" was the objection to the Calvinist view of human nature. See The Transcendentalist Ministers (New Haven, 1959), chapter 1, "Boston Unitarianism--The Context of Transcendentalism," p. 4 and passim.

28. William Charvat, The Origins of American Critical Thought 1810-1835 (Philadelphia, 1936), p. 15.

29. Ibid.

30. NAR, VI (1818), 230, 232. For identification of authors of NAR articles, I have relied on William Cushing, Index to The North American Review I-CXXV (1815-1877) (Cambridge, Mass., 1878).

31. Charvat, pp. 174-192, gives a capsule summary of the critical policy of the magazine during this period, and some very helpful portraits of its leading critics, Williard Phillips, Richard Henry Dana, Sr., W. H. Prescott, Alexander Hill Everett, Edward Tyrell Channing, George Bancroft, Samuel Gilman, and William Howard Gardiner.

Another useful aid is Harry Hayden Clark's "Literary Criticism in the North American Review, 1815-1835," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, XXXII (1940), 299-350, which summarizes 231 literary articles of the period. As reference to Charvat's carefully researched section will show, however, Clark's judgments are not to be relied on. Even his summaries are sometimes misleading.

32. Charvat, p. 198, calls the Examiner "the most important magazine of the years 1830-1835." He has a brief analysis of the magazine's significance and orientation, with a portrait of Channing, pp. 198-201.

For identification of the Examiner's contributors, I have relied on William Cushing, Index to the Christian Examiner 1824-1869 (Boston, 1879). For the Disciple, however, no index exists, so far as I know.

33. For a brief discussion of the probable degree of Channing's direct influence upon Emerson and transcendentalism in general, see my Appendix. The most thorough discussion of this yet to appear in print is David P. Edgell, "Channing and the Transcendentalists," William Ellery Channing: An Intellectual Portrait (Boston, 1955), pp. 113-149.

Edgell also has a chapter on Channing, "The Man of Letters," pp. 202-224, as does Arthur W. Brown, Always Young for Liberty (Syracuse University Press, 1956), pp. 189-204. Both of these discussions strike me as rather superficial, but they seem accurate in their main lines and should be compared with my discussion here, which concentrates on selected aspects of Channing's criticism.

34. See fn. 21 above. Emerson used this article as the basis for his sermon "Hymn Books" (YES, 145-150), which urged the congregation to adopt Greenwood's hymnal, as it subsequently did. In 1846 Emerson still thought Greenwood's the best hymnal in English (J, VII, 161-162).

Emerson's article and sermon are quite different in content but both emphasize the importance of sacred music being good poetry also. A good deal of the article is devoted to discussion of Biblical poetry and translations of it; the sermon contains a longish criticism of the hymnal of Jeremy Belknap, then in use in the parish, mainly on doctrinal and aesthetic grounds.

35. For the theme of the improvement of church music, see CD, III (1815), 321-322; IV (1816), 73. For the objection to the quality of singing, CD, II (1814), 108-110; IV (1816), 73-74. For objections to doctrine (notably in Belknap's hymnal), see CD, IX (1821), 341-350; YES, 148-149. For comments on the relation of sound to sense, CD, II (1814), 245; IV (1816), 74-75; X (1822), 281-284; C Ex, IV (1827), 73f.

36. C Ex, III (1826), 489-498; IV (1827), 67-77, 300-309.

37. C Ex, III (1826), 495.

38. "Music," Aesthetic Papers, ed., Elizabeth P. Peabody (Boston, 1849), pp. 30, 31, 32.

39. C Ex, III (1826), 492.

40. CD, I (1813), 233-236; II (1814), 22-25, 88-91, 122-125, 154-157. The succeeding quotations are all from the first part, pp. 234-236.

41. See, for instance, "Thoughts on the Essentials of Religion," CD, X (1822), 81-86. The main argument here, that the substance of religion is far more important than its forms, is typical of the magazine.

42. This point is made at greatest length in an exerpt from Gisbert's L'Eloquence Chretienne, printed in CD, XI (1823), 427-434, under the title, "On the Popular Style in Preaching."

43. "Dr. Channing's Writings," C Ex, XIV (1833), 54.

44. Ibid., p. 56.

45. CD, II (1814), 122-125, 154-157; Channing's Works (Boston, 1869), III, 17, 252.

46. "Channing," NAR, XLI (1835), 397.

47. Channing, "Likeness to God," Works, III, 228.

48. Elizabeth Peabody reports Channing as saying that Emerson "'is bound to take the utmost care not to bury his own meaning in ambiguous expressions. It is a social duty to utter truths . . . in such a manner that all earnest minds can catch the meaning,'" Reminiscences of Rev. Wm. Ellery Channing, D.D. (Boston, 1880), p. 380.

On the same occasion, she says, Channing told her that he did not disagree with Emerson's ideas though he did think it discourteous of Emerson to have preached those ideas at a place dedicated to promulgating the New Testament (ibid.). At another time, commenting upon the supposed resemblance between "Likeness to God" and transcendentalism, Channing told Peabody that the transcendentalists sometimes "'mistake their individualities for the Transcendent.'" Emerson, he said, does not, but some of his followers do (p. 365).

This last comment may, or may not explain Channing's reaction to Alcott, when in 1837 the latter in conversation "attempted to show the identity of the human soul, in its diviner action, with

God. At this he expressed great dislike, even horror. He felt that doctrines of this character undermined the very foundations of virtue," etc. (The Journals of Bronson Alcott, ed., Odell Shepard (Boston, 1938), p. 85). After recording the conversation, Alcott complains that Channing distrusts him and misunderstands his intellect; perhaps Channing's strong language was aimed at the character of his auditor.

49. Orville Dewey raises this question in his review of Channing, C Ex, XIV (1833), 69-71, though he dismisses it by saying, "the fault is, not in the truth presented, nor in the medium through which it is transmitted, but in the eye, unaccustomed to the contemplation of it" (p. 70). However, in both Dewey's and Everett's articles on Channing, it seems to me, the tone is generally one of veneration mixed with suspicion that in Channing's beautiful expression the argument "is perhaps extended a little beyond the limits, which a rigid analysis of the intellect would proscribe," NAR, XLI (1835), 378, as Everett says of Channing's remarks on the nature of poetry in "Milton."

50. The limitations of Emerson's sermons are doubtless caused by his own immaturity of style as well as the restrictions of convention. However, the latter seems to be the definitive factor when one considers the progression in style during this period which his journals reveal. In the latter there is a quite marked and sudden improvement beginning in 1829. This can be seen by contrasting Emerson's "Sermons and Journal" (JMN, III, 119-158), which contains very few entries after December, 1828, with the regular journal which follows it, "Blotting Book Y" (JMN, III, 163-202), whose first entry is dated October 9, 1829. In "Blotting Book Y" Emerson is much more terse, confident, and metaphoric.

The sermons of the period 1829-1831, however, with few exceptions do not show Emerson's remarkable development in both style and ideas nearly so dramatically as the journals do. In the sermons the change is muted and the insights of the journals smoothed over somewhat for purposes of public expression.

51. CD, X (1822), 84.

52. C Ex, XIV (1833), 81, 83.

53. Works, III, 21-22.

54. Works, III, 145-147. In another interesting passage from this address, Channing goes so far as to say that Christianity changes its character according to the mind of the expositor, to the extent that "the same truth is quite a different thing, when exhibited by men of different habits of thought and feeling" (p. 141). "The sublimest doctrines lose in some hands all their grandeur, and the loveliest all their attractiveness" (P. 142).

55. *Works*, I, 168. Channing makes the same point in "The Moral Argument Against Calvinism," *Works*, I, 219-220, and in "Remarks on National Literature," *Works*, I, 251. These articles were published in the *CD*, VIII (1820), and *C Ex*, VIII (1830), respectively. See also George Ripley's review of Degerando's *Du Perfectionnement Moral*, *C Ex*, IX (1830), 71.

56. Channing, *Works*, I, 172, 173, 174. Incidentally, Fenelon may have been an influence on Emerson. See Kenneth W. Cameron, "Homiletical Background of Emerson's 'Gnothi Seauton,'" *ESQ*, no. 26 (1962), 87-111, which includes exerpts from Fenelon to help explain the genesis of the poem.

57. This is what Channing means by national *literature* in his "Remarks:" "the expression of a nation's mind in writing," (*Works*, I, 243). It is a great mistake to conclude that by the term "literature" Channing, Emerson, and their contemporaries meant only imaginative literature (poetry, fiction, drama), or what is thought of as literature in college English courses today. However, in "Fenelon" Channing *is* arguing for a greater infusion of imagination into theological writing.

58. Channing, *Works*, I, 167.

59. *Ibid*., pp. 211-212.

60. "On Figurative Language," *CD*, XI (1823), 181.

61. According to Charvat, one of the basic principles of the criticism of the period 1810-1835 is, "literature must not contain anything derogatory, implicitly or explicitly, to religious ideals and moral standards" (p. 13ff).

62. *CD*, III (1815), 184.

63. *CD*, XI (1823), 129ff. The same apology is used to preface a review of George Bancroft's poems, *Ibid*., p. 466ff. Bancroft's work is briefly commended for "moral beauty" and criticized as a bit too self-centered. Percival is praised for his ability but assailed at length for his idea that poetry should be dashed off quickly or it will not be genuine. His lack of respect for moral distinctions is also censured.

    It is interesting to note that both the *CD* and the *NAR* (Alvan Lamson, "Percival's Phi Beta Kappa Poem," XXII (1826), 317-333) sharply attack Percival's theory of writing by inspiration. His theory, however, is rather brash--for instance, he defends hasty writing on the grounds that it is the only way for writers in America to make enough money (*CD*, XI (1823), 133-134), and really does not bear comparison to Channing's or Emerson's except insofar as all three share the common romantic assumption of art as determined by individual expression rather than rules of taste.

64. Orville Dewey, "The Bravo: A Tale," C Ex, XII (1832), 84.

65. C Ex, III (1826), 408. This article has also been ascribed to Andrews Norton (L, I, 199).

For Mrs. Hemans' reputation see William B. Cairns, On the Development of American Literature from 1815 to 1833, Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin Philology and Literature Series, I, i (1898), 16-17. (This study is superseded by Charvat, but is still useful in spots.) Mrs. Hemans was a special favorite of the Examiner, not only because of the piety of her poems, but because of her personal acquaintance with Andrews Norton.

66. NAR, XXIV (1827), 444.

67. C Ex, XII (1832), 79.

68. C Ex, XVI (1834), 389.

69. Works, I, 209.

70. C Ex, III (1826), 305. Peabody makes the same point in NAR, XXVIII (1829), 4, the article on "The Decline of Poetry." The passage about the decline from Milton, Dryden, and Pope is on p. 7.

Actually, Peabody has been maligned somewhat unjustly, as by Clark, (op. cit., p. 301), for his reactionary remarks. In fact, his articles show a fairly sensitive and judicious appreciation of Byron and Wordsworth.

71. C Ex, III (1826), 306, 314.

72. Works, I, 9, 7.

73. Ibid., pp. 7, 8.

74. Mary Emerson's opinions were mixed. In her diary for July, 1826, she wrote: "when I read Channing, I felt disgusted with the errors of Milton, & with that sort of idolatry with which the Doctor approached him. I have never read a better review, which brings to mind the afflicted & wondrous Poet,--the lover of freedom,--though, alas, the ambitious man . . ." (MME IV, p. 288).

Charles C. Emerson quoted Channing's remarks that "Poetry seems to us the divinest of the arts," and "Poetry has a natural alliance with our best affections" during his Bowdoin Prize-winning essay (1828), reprinted by Kenneth W. Cameron, in ESQ, no. 16 (1959), 4-11, 22, 30. Channing, Hall's (Norton's?) review of Hemans, and Sampson Reeds's Oration on Genius are all quoted for support for an affirmative answer to the topic's question, "Whether the Moral Influence of Poetry has Been on the Whole Beneficial to Mankind?" (pp. 6, 11). Charles' main idea is "that Poetry from its nature must have a goodmoral influence, and secondly, from its history, that it has exerted such an influence" (p. 5).

On the whole, his essay is rather mechanical, but it is an interesting sidelight on his brother's thought. For instance, Charles explains how Shakespeare, though he led a vulgar life, could have written so well: "It was the inspiration of Poetry. And here I use the term in no vague metaphorical sense. It was a true, celestial inspiration . . . . It was a 'divine afflatus' the voice of the God within him, that spoke from his lips . . ." (pp. 7-8).

75. Prose Writings of William Cullen Bryant, ed., Parke Godwin (New York, 1889), I, 22-24. Since these lectures were given in 1825, and Channing's essay did not appear until 1826, it is a question exactly when Bryant read and attached the quotation to the posthumously-published manuscript.

76. NAR, XLI (1835), 375.

77. W.B.O. Peabody, C Ex, III (1826), 305.

78. C. C. Felton, "Dewey's Phi Beta Kappa Oration and Mellen's Poem," C Ex, IX (1830), 226.

79. See, for example, C Ex, XVI (1834), 180-181, 389; XVIII (1835), 260-261.

80. For the relevant parts of these two articles, see NAR, XXIX (1829), 221-222; and XXXIV (1832), 63-64.

81. NAR, XLI (1835), 378. Note that in this passage Everett equates philosophy and religion.

82. C Ex, III (1826), 306.

83. C Ex, IX (1830), 46-58.

84. Frothingham, pp. 111, 113.

85. See Edgell, pp. 134-137 and 113-149 passim.

86. Emerson's strategy in this passage is very clever, as most of the specific attack is directed upon the doctrine of the trinity, equally objectionable to his hearers; immediately after this, however, he also objects to the doctrine of miracles (129).

87. That Emerson's Concord pastor Barzillai Frost inspired some of his criticisms of contemporary preaching is evident from the journal of the previous winter and spring and is discussed in Conrad Wright, "Emerson, Barzillai Frost and the Divinity School Address," Harvard Theological Review, XLIX (1956), 19-43.

89. "People imagine that the place which the Bible holds in the world

it owes to miracles," Emerson wrote in 1839. "It owes it simply to the fact that it came out of a profounder depth of thought than any other book, and the effect must be precisely proportionate" (J, V, 335).

89. "Emerson as American Scripture," NEQ, XVI (1943), 95.

90. This point is made in the 1825 lecture "On Originality and Imitation," Prose Writings, I, 37. The article on metrics is in the NAR, IX (1819), 426-431, and included in Prose Writings, I, 57-67.

91. This point is made in a passage of the lecture on literature given as the second in a course called "The Present Age" (pp. 4-5v. Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.) The passage, revised, appeared in the Dial essay "Thoughts on Modern Literature," which is based on the lecture as a whole. Cabot omitted the passage when he republished the article, but Edward Emerson reprints part of it as a footnote to "Shakespeare" (CW, IV, 357-358n).

92. Lecture on "The Poet" (1841), pp. 23, 23v, 24. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

93. The lecture has the editorial title, "Introduction, praise of knowledge;" p. 12. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

94. Works, I, 274.

95. Op. cit., p. 13.

96. See Cairns, pp. 15-16, for Byron's mixed reception during this period. As Charvat, p. 3, points out, by 1835 the vogue of Byron was over. Emerson's comments on Byron in his 1836 lecture "Modern Aspects of Letters" (EL, I, 372-374) clearly show that Byron was no longer interesting to him.

CHAPTER II

1. The best short study of Emerson's theory of the creative process is Norman Foerster, "Emerson on the Organic Principle in Art" (PMLA, 1926; in Konvitz and Whicher, pp. 108-120), which argues as I do here that Emerson stressed depth of intuition above perfectness in execution while not denying the importance of the latter. Matthiessen (pp. 24-29) says much the same thing but emphasizes the paradoxicalness of Emerson's position.

   Vivian Hopkins' chapter on Emerson's idea of the creative process (Spires of Form (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 17-62) is the most detailed treatment of the subject yet published. It differs from mine in putting all Emerson's comments together in a single schema--the center of which is a passage from "The Poet" (CW, III, 26-27)--

rather than treating the subject chronologically, as a development. Since Emerson's thought undergoes considerable modification between 1820-1844, and since it is misleading in any case to synthesize extracts from essays on widely different subjects, I have strong reservations about Hopkins' method, which is used also in the two other sections of her book, on Emerson's conceptions of the work of art (pp. 63-146) and the aesthetic experience (pp. 147-230). However, her accounts in all three cases, are valuable for the way they collect a great deal of his commentary, including unpublished remarks.

A useful unpublished study of Emerson's theory of the creative process is Carl F. Strauch, "A Critical and Variorum Edition of Emerson's Poems" (Yale University, 1946), introduction, pp. 113-131.

Finally, Sherman Paul, "The Angle of Vision," Emerson's Angle of Vision (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), pp. 71-102, illuminates Emerson's theory by showing more broadly that he regarded mental activity as properly an alternation of perception and expression. Paul's chapter is anthologized in Konvitz and Whicher, pp. 158-178.

2. "Essay on the Doctrine of Divine Influence," C Ex, XVII (1835), 311-332; XVIII (1835), 50-84, 230-259. See especially part 3, pp. 238-244. Emerson, however, goes much further than Brazer, in considering divine influence in ordinary life as not different in kind from the miracles of the gospel.

3. Three manuscripts of this sermon exist. One is fragmentary and undated; the other two are complete and dated May 30, 1830, and March 31, 1832, respectively. McGiffert gives the earlier date in his index (YES, 266), but prints the later version without explanation. The second version is considerably revised, and though most of the changes are made for style and elaboration primarily, the tone is also somewhat bolder.

4. According to the editors, the text of the 1834 lecture, now missing, was probably not much altered for the NAR article, from which the Centenary Edition version was taken (EL, I, 144).

5. See for example JMN, III, 274; IV, 255; V, 50, 72, 254, 283; EL, I, 352.

6. James Elliot Cabot, A Memoir of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Cambridge, Mass., 1893), I, 292. Jonathan Bishop has an excellent discussion of Emersonian tone, Emerson on the Soul (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 128-143.

7. Readings on Herrick, Donne, *et al*. (1869), p. 12. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

8. Strauch dissertation, pp. 133f. The composition of the poems "Days" and "Seashore" are the most famous examples of this method of writing by inspiration (CW, IX, 479, 484 quote the journal passages in which Emerson indicates that he wrote the poems as if

by a kind of dictation.)

9. At least this is the conclusion one draws from looking at the manuscript, which varies greatly from the printed version. Cabot says, in his preface to Letters and Social Aims, that he did not "attempt, in preparing the copy for the press, to adhere always to a single manuscript. To have attempted this would have been contrary to Mr. Emerson's wishes" (CW, VIII, xii).

10. See for example "On Models in Literature," NAR, III (1816), 202-209; "Montgomery's Poems," NAR, IX (1819), 283.

11. The oration is printed in Cameron, Emerson the Essayist, II, 9-12.

12. "Genius," Lecture course in "Human Life," p. 4. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

13. Idem.

14. EL, I, 296. The example Emerson here gives is Luther; he had made the same point in the 1834 lecture on Luther (EL, I, 220).

15. In summarizing this lecture at the beginning of the next, Emerson distinguishes between reason and reflection as passive and active powers (EL, I, 305). But as far as I can see, this distinction is not maintained in the lecture itself.

16. This conception of history, which enters Emerson's thought about 1836, figures heavily in such essays of the early '40s as "History" and "Thoughts on Modern Literature."

17. "Genius," p. 4v.

18. Hopkins, p. 32ff.

19. Emerson and Asia (Cambridge, Mass., 1930), p. 89f.

20. The critic is Stuart Gerry Brown, "Emerson's Platonism," NEQ, XVIII (1945), 343. I do not mean to deny influence upon Emerson from Proclus and the neoplatonists, whom he much admired, only to oppose the idea that he "got" his concept of inspiration from reading them.

21. Whicher, p. 141.

22. Ibid., p. 138.

23. Ibid., pp. 144, 147; Frederick William Conner, Cosmic Optimism (Gainesville, Fla., 1949), p. 45.

24. This address gives the first hint of the Tantalus and Proteus motifs, which are later used in such essays as "Nature" to suggest the elusiveness of nature and the frustration of him who seeks to read her secrets.

25. See for example *J*, V, 376, 512; VI, 73, 84-85.

26. "The Poet," p. 30.

27. These are each discussed under their respective headings in the first chapter of Hopkins' book.

28. "The Poet," pp. 2-6v; *CW*, III, 5-6; VIII, 22-23.

29. "The Poet," p. 15v.

30. p. 25.

31. See for example *L*, II, 4-5, 138-141 (Alcott); *L*, II, 142; *J*, V, 369 (Fuller); *L*, III, 61, 63, 65, 74; *L*, IV, 516 (Newcomb); *J*, VI, 304-305 (Thoreau).

32. See for example Emerson and Furness, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

33. "Doctrine of the Soul," lecture course on "Human Life," p. 7v. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

34. "Literature," part two, third lecture in the series on "The Present Age," p. 2v.

35. "Doctrine of the Soul," p. 7.

36. The same thing happens again in 1842. See *L*, III, 58-59, 74-75.

37. Comments on one or more of these poems can be found in *L*, I, 340; *JMN*, III, 305-307; *CW*, II, 247; *CW*, VIII, 33, 346; *J*, X, 262; and *Parnassus* (Boston, 1875), p. ix.

38. Pp. vii-viii. In fact, the entire passage "The poet demands all gifts . . . . he has done more for the sanity of this generation than any other writer" (*CW*, XII, 366-367) was lifted from "Europe and European Books" to comprise almost the entire section on Wordsworth in the preface to *Parnassus*. In December 1870, Emerson had written in a notebook, "I ought to write a paper on Wordsworth partly from my Dial paper & partly from MSS" (*PY*, p. 254. Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

39. See *J*, VI, 243-244; *CW*, XII, 372. In the *Dial* review of Tennyson, Emerson took "Ulysses" as one sign of a deepening tone in Tennyson's second volume of poems which the first had lacked (*Unc*, 170-171).

40. This drawback, however, could also become a virtue in Emerson's eyes, as when he contrasts Tennyson's representativeness with Browning's ingenuity in _J_, VIII, 455.

41. "Poetry and Criticism" (1861), p. 22v. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

42. Readings on poetry and imagination (1872), p. 9v. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

43. This can be seen in _J_, X, 68, 267-268, and in several unpublished lectures of the period.

44. See for example _J_, II, 106; _CW_, I, 182.

45. _CR_, p. 51. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

CHAPTER III

1. The most thorough study of Emerson's idea of correspondence is Sherman Paul, _Emerson's Angle of Vision_, which notes that for transcendentalism "'correspondence' was the catch-all word for much of the work of the shift from the conception of the universe as a mechanism from which God was estranged to that of the universe as organism in which the mind was a unifying necessity" (pp. 32-33).

2. For Emerson's idea of Swedenborg's significance to poetry, see especially _CW_, III, 35-36 and IV, 117ff. In "Poetry and Imagination," Emerson says, "I count the genius of Swedenborg and Wordsworth as the agents of a reform in philosophy, the bringing poetry back to Nature . . ." (_CW_, VIII, 66).

    For Emerson's falling out with the Swedenborgians, see _J_, VI, 219-220, and C. P. Hotson's "Emerson and the Swedenborgians," _SP_, XXVII (1930), 517-545. Among Emerson's manuscripts is an interesting poem entitled "S.R." (it is printed and annotated in Strauch's dissertation), which apostrophizes Sampson Reed, "whose early reverend genius my young eye / With wonder followed & undoubting joy," lamenting how "thou, reputed speaker for the soul," have now become a "Sleek deacon of the new Jerusalem, / And hast defied soliciting world to be / A blind man's blind man."

3. See, for example, _EL_, I, 224; _CW_, II, 24. Carlyle used the symbol in _Past and Present_, chapter two.

4. The heading of one 1839 journal entry reads, "_To know One you must know all_" (_J_, V, 191). For applying this idea to the poem, I am indebted to Thomas R. Whitaker, "The Riddle of Emerson's 'Sphinx,'" _AL_, XXVII (1955), 191-193, whose analysis of the poem is much the best that I have seen.

5. This quotation is from a Thoreau ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard. A shorter version of Thoreau's analysis, which leaves out this final comment, is in Thoreau's Journal, ed., Bradford Torrey (Cambridge, 1906), I, 229-237.

6. P. 91. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.) Jeffrey's definition is in the Ed. Rev., L (1829), 35.

7. Op. cit., p. 66.

8. For discussion of Coleridge, see ibid., pp. 38-51, 60. For discussion of the Swedenborgians, see pp. 62-67. Paul also claims that Channing adumbrated Emerson's idea of correspondence (pp. 52-56.) This seems to me a bit misleading. Channing was not really interested in the relation between man and nature; but it is true that his view of man was certainly favorable to the development of Emerson's idea of nature, and that Channing himself was receptive to the ideas of Wordsworth and Coleridge. On the other hand, the precise relation of Channing to these and other literary men of the English romantic movement is by no means clear. Arthur W. Brown says that Channing "turned to the English Romantics for the development of imagination and poetical enthusiasm to supplement the 'partial culture of the mind' afforded by the empirical philosophy and sensational psychology of his day" (William Ellery Channing (New York, 1961), p. 44), but neither he nor other biographers and critics of Channing who have made the same suggestion have solidly supported it.

9. I owe this observation to Richard P. Adams, "Emerson and the Organic Metaphor," PMLA, LXIX (1954), 121.

10. Another meter of this change is the way Emerson exerpts from Herbert's "Man" in "Prospects," so that the poem is turned from a prayer to God into a praise of man (CW, I, 68-69).

11. "The universe is pervaded with myriads of secret analogies that tie together its remotest parts as the atmosphere of a summer morning is filled with innumerable gossamer threads running in every direction but revealed by the breams of the rising sun. So when the soul which in its activity is light begins to throw out its rays, it finds it has been living amidst beauty all unperceived, amidst power with which it has never armed itself, and wisdom, yet was a fool."

12. "All Truth is Related." Here Emerson says that the unity of God is suggested by the fact that "every eye sees & every heart feels the harmony & relation of all the parts [of the universe] of each to the other & of the mind of man to all. A sublime evidence of [God's] Unity comes from the strict correspondence of the outward to the intellectual world & of every truth to every other truth" (S, 127.2).

13. From the lists of the Emerson family's book borrowings from the Boston Public Library, the Athaeneum, and Harvard College given by Kenneth Cameron, it appears that starting in 1830 Emerson began to read heavily in natural science. See Kenneth W. Cameron, Ralph Waldo Emerson's Reading (Raleigh, N.C., 1941), pp. 17-20, 47; Emerson the Essayist, II, 162-164.

14. For the impression this exhibit made upon him see JMN, IV, 198-200, and EL, I, 2-3, 7-10.

15. Charvat, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

16. Elizabeth Peabody, "Spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures," C Ex, XVI (1834), 175-176. George B. Cheever, "Lowth's Hebrew Poetry," NAR, XXXI (1831), 364-365, also discusses the natural origin of the Hebrew language. George Ripley reviewed James Marsh's translation of Herder's Spirit of Hebrew Poetry unfavorably in the C Ex, XVIII (1835), 167-221. An interesting article on "Hebrew Poetry" appears in the New England Magazine, I (1831), 97-104; according to the writer, Hebrew poetry was *limited* by its shortage of abstract words, but compensates for this lack by making "the exterior world an illustration of the operations of the mind;" thus it has "all the beauties of description without missing that moral dignity which mere description never can attain" (p. 103).

Lowth's theories would have been available to Emerson in a college textbook, Hugh Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (London, 1796), III, 165-189. Sampson Reed alludes to the naturalistic origin of language in "Oration on Genius," Emerson the Essayist, II, 10.

The pedagogical experiments of Peabody and Alcott with the idea of language as derived from nature are discussed in John B. Wilson's two articles, both entitled "Grimm's Law and the Brahmins," NEQ, XVI (1943), 91-105; XXXVIII (1965), 234-239.

17. See G. Oegger, The True Messiah, reprinted in Emerson the Essayist, II, 83-99; also, Emerson's transcript of Oegger, JMN, V, 66-70.

18. See, for example, Matthiessen, pp. 30-44. Other useful discussions of Emerson's idea of the symbol include Emerson Sutcliffe, Emerson's Theories of Literary Expression, University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, VIII, 1 (1923), pp. 17-48 especially; Feidelson, pp. 121-135 *passim*; Hopkins, pp. 114-117 and 121-134 *passim*. Bishop, pp. 119-128, discusses Emerson's idea of metaphor in terms of his own practice.

19. See JMN, V, 77, 106.

20. According to the editors, the manuscript of the latter lecture may have been revised after Nature (EL, I, 287).

21. For the contemporary prevalence of this broad definition, see chapter two, note 57.

22. See Ernest Fenollosa, The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry, ed., Ezra Pound (San Francisco, c. 1936). The parallels between Fenollosa and Emerson are most striking, not only in idea but in style; Fenollosa, however, is exclusively interested in the aesthetic properties of the image. A useful article which compares the two is Donald M. Murray's "Emerson's 'Language as Fossil Poetry': An Analogy from Chinese," NEQ, XXIX (1956), 204-215.

23. This aphorism, perhaps inspired by Sampson Reed's Oration on Genius," became a catch-phrase with Emerson. He used versions of it throughout his career--once to admonish Carlyle about his style (E-C, 99).

24. Vivian Hopkins has done a good deal of research on the relation of Platonic and neoplatonic thought to Emerson's idea of "spiritual form," as she calls the conception of the work as preexisting in the divine mind. See especially op. cit., pp. 65-66; also "Emerson and Cudworth: Plastic Nature and Transcendental Art," AL, XXIII (1951), 92 and passim. The article proceeds on the very shaky assumption that the main idea of the Dial article on "Art" was conceived after, and represents an advance upon the 1841 essay of that title; however, the parallels she draws between Emerson and Cudworth's book are quite interesting. In "The Influence of Goethe on Emerson's Aesthetic Theory," PQ, XXVII (1948), 333-334, Hopkins suggests that Emerson may have first learned about the conception of spiritual form from a German translation of Plotinus by Goethe.

25. Ms. version of "Poetry and Imagination," p. 33. (In Houghton Library, Harvard.)

26. For Emerson's distinctions between fancy and imagination see especially CW, VIII, 28-29; also J, VII, 68-69, J, IX, 285, CW, X, 78. Sometimes he uses these terms interchangeably, as in CW, IV, 17.

27. Hopkins, op. cit., p. 38f. Coleridge's definition is at the end of chapter 13 of the Biographia Literaria.

28. Emerson considered that in the England of 1558-1660, "not only in the masters, but in the general style of the pulpit and the history of that time, there is greater freedom, less affectation, greater emphasis, bolder figure and homelier idiom than in books of the same classes at the present day" (J, V, 22). The resemblance of Emerson's writing to this period's and possible influences are sketchily summarized in J. Russell Roberts, "Emerson's Debt to the Seventeenth Century," AL, XXI (1949), 298-310, and Norman A. Brittin, "Emerson and the Metaphysical Poets," AL, VIII (1936), 1-21. Matthiessen, pp. 100ff. has a more imaginative discussion.

Emerson's liking for the period reflects a current in American criticism which began as early as 1820 and was quickened by the romantic movement. W.B.O. Peabody complained in 1829 that "the versification of English poetry was polished slowly and with great labor, from the roughness of the metaphysical poets; but certain writers have lately found particular beauty in this very roughness, and labored with singular diligence to make their own verse lame and halting," NAR, XXVIII (1829), 9. A representative early review favorable to the metaphysicals is Theophilus Parsons, "Comparative Merits of the Earlier and Later English Writers," NAR, X (1820), 19-33, which argues that the overrefined neo-classical style is now going out of fashion and that the American taste should now go to school to the more vigorous and original writers of the seventeenth century, but balance these by reading the classics at the same time.

29. "The Method of Nature" and the lecture version of "The Poet," which is much like the essay in its style, also seem to have been written about the same time, in the summer and fall, respectively, of 1841, when Emerson was reading a good deal in neoplatonism.

30. In the ms. (cf. CW, VIII, 27), p. 43v ends with ". . . after the apparent." P. 44 begins a new paragraph ("As a power it is . . ." etc.), at the top left of which is written "Imagination," indicating that "it" refers to "imagination," rather than "poetry."

31. The lecture, which bears the editorial title "Genius, imagination, taste," was given in 1866. (Ms. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

32. Feidelson, pp. 150, 146. The duckshot simile is Carlyle's (E-C, 371).

33. The Italian phrase is credited to Coleridge's Table Talk in Emerson's "Encyclopedia," p. 143.

34. For a sense of the importance of "property" and other Emersonian puns, I am indebted to Bishop, pp. 109-112.

35. Op. cit., p. 237.

36. Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson (Boston, 1960), pp. 481-483.

37. Ms. (part 2), pp. 5ff.

38. It is hard to say just how much of a hand Cabot had in preparing "Poetry and Imagination." According to his preface to Letters and Social Aims, in 1872 Emerson already had the proof sheets for the essay in his hands, but "sentences, even whole pages, were repeated, and there was a confusion of order beyond what even he would have tolerated" (CW, VIII, x). By 1875, Cabot says, Emerson was unable to make the revisions himself (xi). The most complete manuscript version extant is virtually identical to the text up to p. 18,

similar to the text in language but often different in the ordering of passages through the end of "Creation," and similar in language but very different in order for the last ten pages of the essay. No late manuscript versions of the sections "Melody, Rhyme, Form" and "Bards and Trouveurs" are extant. The former was dealt with in "The Poet (1841) and "Poetry & Criticism in England & America" (1861), but I can find no earlier version of the latter, which is the least interesting section of the essay, being made up mostly from quotations. Probably these and the slender commentary which introduces them were taken from Emerson's notes for public readings.

39. "Emerson's Literary Method," MP, XLII (1944), 85-89. As my next section shows, I agree in a general way with the authors' conclusions, but their assertion that Emerson's method is based on Plato's theory of the twice-bisected line is fantastically pedantic.

40. The lecture deals in turn with men's need and love of expression both physical and intellectual; the symbolic quality of nature and men's love of symbols; the character and office of the poet; the materials he uses--"Verse or Metrical language" (21); and the situation of poetry at the present time. There is also a double sheet in the middle of the lecture, perhaps misplaced, which emphasizes that symbols cannot be tied to one meaning.

The lecture differs markedly from the essay only in the tone of the last section, which has been noted above, and in its lengthy discussions of rhythm and rhyme; however, few passages from it were transferred directly to "The Poet" or "Poetry and Imagination." On the whole, the lecture has a good deal of continuity and if published would be of intrinsic as well as academic interest.

41. The lecture passages in question are "The Poet," pp. 2-4v and 15-16v; "Literature" of New England, pp. 24-24v. The latter was taken from EL, II, 263-264. (Mss. in Houghton Library, Harvard.)

42. Pp. 12-12v.

43. Pp. 25v-32v.

44. Journals, p. 82.

45. Surprise as an element furnished by works of genius is discussed at some length in the 1839 lecture on "Genius," pp. 18-19v, and in an 1861 lecture on "Genius and temperament" (editorial title), pp. 36-43v.

46. See especially W. T. Harris, "The Dialectic Unity in Emerson's Prose," Journal of Speculative Philosophy, XVIII (1884), 195-202; Blair and Faust, op. cit.; Paul, pp. 107-118; F. I. Carpenter, Emerson Handbook (New York, 1953), pp. 74ff. This last gives a good birdseye view of the state of critical opinion.

47. Conduct of Life is interesting, as Paul points out, for its division into groups of three essays. "Fate," "Power," and "Wealth" are on the prudential level; "Culture," "Behavior," and "Worship" on what might be called the level of morals; "Beauty" and "Illusions" are on the most abstract level. As for "Considerations by the Way," it does not seem to have much connection with this patterns; as Paul says, with characteristic suavity, although it is "not especially organic in this series, [it] is not out of tune with the rest" (p. 118).

48. Ibid., pp. 112ff.

49. Cf. Paul's observation of the same polarities in Essays, First Series, Ibid., p. 117.

50. "Emerson through Kierkegaard: Toward a Definition of Emerson's Theory of Communication," ELH, XXIV (1957), 242. Lee's essay on "Compensation" is "Emerson's 'Compensation' as Argument and as Art," NEQ, XXXVII (1964), 291-305.

51. It might be mentioned that Emerson attached particular importance to this sermon, which he preached eighteen times (YES, 270), the first time just one week before the sermon on "The Lord's Supper." It is clear from the introduction (S, 160.1-sv) that Emerson meant it as a summation of his views on the subject. Evidently McGiffert decided to reprint instead "Religion and Society" (YES, 191-202), which makes the same point that "the greatest truth" of religion is that "God is within us" (S, 160, 11). The essay on "Worship" also makes use of the idea in these two sermons that religion depends upon the character of the worshipper and is about to come to its highest development in history, on New England soil.

52. "The Dialectic Unity of Emerson's Prose," p. 199.

53. V. James L. Guetti, "The Failure of the Imagination: A Study of Melville, Conrad, and Faulkner," Cornell University, 1964, especially the introductory and concluding chapters.

54. The best discussions are Foerster, "Emerson on the Organic Principle in Art;" Matthiessen, pp. 133-140; Hopkins, pp. 66-102 and ff. passim; Feidelson, pp. 142-149; and R. P. Adams, op. cit. Of these Matthiessen most closely follows Emerson's way of expression.

55. R. P. Adams, op. cit., p. 130.

56. Two indicative, though by no means exhaustive dicassions of this contrast are David D. Anderson, "A Comparison of the Poetic Theories of Emerson and Poe, in Personalist, XLI (1960), 471-483; and Clark Griffith, "'Emersonianism' and 'Poeism': Some Versions of the Romantic Sensibility," MLQ, XXI (1961), 125-134. Foerster,

American Criticism, pp. 52-59, also has a short comparison.

57. The contrast between these two poems is discussed in Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton, 1961), pp. 162-163.

58. For a discussion of the resemblance between Emerson and Saadi, see Matthiessen, pp. 71-75.

59. My summary does not mean to imply that there is a hard and fast unity to the poem. As Edward Emerson notes, the poem "has a reasonable unity" (CW, IX, 501), but between the stanzas there are sometimes considerable gaps; moreover, the equivocal phrase "as printed here" (501) suggests that the manuscript was doctored up before publication, though I cannot be sure, not having seen it. On the whole, the poem is best regarded as a sequence of moods.

CHAPTER IV

1. Works, III, 106-107.

2. Ibid., I, 61.

3. Ibid., I, 226.

4. Ibid., IV, 32.

5. See for example "On Figurative Language," CD, XI (1823), 178-187; "Thoughts on the Essentials of Religion," CD, X (1822), 81-86; Orville Dewey, "Woods' Lectures on the Inspiration of the Scriptures," C Ex, VIII (1830), 382-391.

6. "On the Unitarian Belief," C Ex, XVIII (1835), 278-287.

7. The manuscript, however, includes this sentence, which is crossed out: "Prayer in its widest sense imports more than petition. It signifies Communion with God" (S, 86.2).

8. The essay's definition of "prudence" is to be found as early as S, 63.5-6v.

9. Arthur McGiffert writes in the introduction to YES, "At few points in his intellectual development does a more striking change take place than in regard to his views of the significance of miracle" (xxviii). It is true, as McGiffert says, that the early Emerson believed in historical miracles, yet it is likewise true that at no point in his preaching does he attach great importance to them per se, and that in this sermon and even more in "The Holy Spirit"

(see my discussion below) Emerson's interest is in the thing signified by the miracle, not in the event itself.

Actually, the position of the "Miracles" sermon is not even anti-transcendentalist. For example, in his essay on Swedenborg, F. H. Hedge writes that he believes in historical miracles but that his faith does not rest on that ground. Historical evidence is merely corroboration, not authority, for religious truth; "even miracles, considered as historical evidence, are of comparatively little value." "The ultimate test of every revelation . . . must be its intrinsic evidence, the consent of reason to the truth of a doctrine not discoverable, or not urged with a sufficient sanction, until revealed" (C Ex, XV (1833), 206, 207.

Finally, it is worth noting that even Emerson's condemnation of miracles in "The Divinity School Address" is somewhat equivocal; "the word Miracle, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression" (CW, I, 129). Neither here nor anywhere else does Emerson deny the historicity of miracle; he simply considers this question irrelevant, and pernicious when given too much attention.

10. Italics mine.

11. For similar views of doctrine by Channing, see for example Works, III, 9ff, 173, 221-222.

12. Emerson records the same experience in reading Martin Luther (JMN, IV, 352).

13. Emerson and Asia, pp. 247-248.

14. See pp. 14-15 above.

15. Op. cit., p. 207.

16. Incidentally, this is another sermon which exists in two versions clearly dated more than a year apart, between which some development in Emerson's thought can be traced. I summarize the earlier version here, since it better lends itself for comparison to the Essays.

17. F. O. Matthiessen (p. 521) reports that Walt Whitman was impressed by this very sentence. Probably Whitman liked it for different reasons than I and perhaps my interpretation of it and indeed the whole essay attributes too much shrewdness to Emerson. But I see the same shrewdness in the organization of "Self-Reliance" and "Circles," which are revolutionary to the point of anarchy until Emerson reveals his premises.

18. See "Find Your Calling," YES, 163-169.

19. Works, III, 233.

20. A more clear example of the beginnings of the shift in American philosophical thought toward a definition of "reason" in the Coleridgian sense is James Marsh's preface to the first American edition of Coleridge's Aids to Reflection (Burlington, Vt., 1829), pp. xvi-xix. Without declaring absolute agreement with Coleridge's position, Marsh (a trinitarian) tries to persuade his reader of the reasonableness of Coleridge's definition by, among other things, broadening the meaning of the word "rational" from "that which conforms to logic" to "that which is plausible or credible." (paraphrase, not quotation.)

    Channing does not so explicitly extend the idea of reason, but he does so tacitly, particularly in "Christianity a Rational Religion" (see discussion below).

21. Works, IV, 36, 37. Dewey's fear that Channing had extended the scope of reason too far is expressed in "Dr. Channing's Writings," C Ex, XIV (1833), 74. Emerson's sermon "Reason and Revelation" (S, 92) takes the same view of the issue of revelation vs. reason as Channing's discourse.

22. Works, III, 274.

23. For Channing on Hopkins, see Ibid., IV, 344; for Emerson on Channing see my appendix; for Dewey on Emerson, see "Ralph Waldo Emerson," Konvitz and Whicher, pp. 25 and passim.

24. This idea is the main point of Roland Lee's provocative article, "Emerson through Kierkegaard: Toward a Definition of Emerson's Theory of Communication," ELH, XXIV (1957), 229-248. See also Hopkins, pp. 214-218 and chapter three passim, which notes that Emerson's idea of aesthetic purpose is to induce in the reader the artist's state of mind. I am also indebted to Bishop's discussion of the relation between Emerson's message and his style, pp. 101-105, for some of my points in this section.

25. Alcott, Journals, pp. 89-91, 128.

26. For more on this interest of Emerson see Nelson F. Adkins, "Emerson and the Bardic Tradition," PMLA, LXIII (1948), 662-677.

27. See James Russell Lowell, "Emerson the Lecturer," Literary Essays (Boston and New York, 1910), 349-360. For a discussion of Emerson as a lecturer which distills the main points of the more important sources, see Herbert A. Wichelns, "Ralph Waldo Emerson," A History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed., William Norman Brigance (New York, 1943), II, 501-525.

28. Journals, pp. 82, 279.

29. See CW, XI, 631-632 for Holmes's account; cf. Lowell, op. cit., pp. 359-360.

30. For the reaction of the audience to the poem, see Carl F. Strauch, "The Background for Emerson's Boston Hymn," AL, XIV (1942), 36ff.

31. *Op. cit.*, p. 251.

CONCLUSION

1. *Works*, I, 274.

APPENDIX

1. A good summary of Channing criticism is Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The interpretation of Channing," *NEQ*, XXX (1957), 99-105. Lenthiel H. Downs, "Emerson and Dr. Channing: Two Men from Boston," *NEQ*, XX (1947), 516-534, conveniently collects much of Emerson's commentary on Channing and explains the circumstantial relationship of the two men. Arthur I. Ladu, "Channing and Transcendentalism," *AL*, XI (1939), 129-137, argues that this relation is not really significant and that Channing should be conceived as a liberal Unitarian without much influence upon transcendentalism. Donald P. Edgell, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-149, admits the force of Ladu's argument that it is impossible to prove Channing's influence on Emerson *et al.* but maintains that Channing was closer in spirit to transcendentalism than conservative Unitarianism. I am roughly in agreement with Edgell but have drawn on all these articles for my discussion below.

2. See *Journals*, pp. 19, 50, 85-86, 105.

3. Edgell subscribes to Emerson's assessment in his chapter on Channing as a "Man of Letters," adding the interesting point that Channing writes quite hastily and probably without much revision (p. 222). Even so, in my judgment there is more vitality to his style than Edgell or Emerson concede--his forcefulness cannot be explained merely as "oratory."

4. For the Channing-Parker relationship, see Edgell, pp. 143-148.

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